

## Semicolon Rules

The semicolon provides an emphatic separation between independent clauses; it affords an easier transition than the period. A semicolon demonstrates a close relationship between paired statements written in parallel construction.

**Rule 1:** Use a semicolon to link closely related complete clauses that are not joined by a coordinating conjunction.

**Example:** **Effective communication is the key to success in the workplace, for people need to communicate effectively to be productive at work.** (with a coordinating conjunction)

Effective communication is the key to success in the workplace; people need to communicate effectively to be productive at work. (with a semicolon)

**Rule 2:** Use a semicolon between complete clauses joined by a transitional expression. The transitional expression is usually followed by a comma.

**Examples:** Students need to learn the skills to communicate with the general American public; **furthermore**, it is impossible to be successful in personal service employment without the ability to communicate well.

While the doctor may be intelligent, his poor communication skills may influence our perception; **in other words**, we may question the quality of his education.

**Rule 3:** Use a semicolon between items in a series that contain internal (other) punctuation.

**Examples:** The cities we passed through on our road trip last summer were Denver, Colorado; Moab, Utah; Winnemucca, Nevada; and Bend, Oregon.

The characters in the *Star Trek* TV series included Jim Kirk, the Captain; Mr. Spock, the First Mate; Bones, the Doctor; and Scotty, the Chief Engineer.

**Rule 4:** DO NOT use a semicolon between elements of a sentence that have unequal weight such as between an independent clause and a dependent clause.

**Examples:** Every civilization has attributes of every other civilization present within it, making it impossible to have authentic civilization clashes. (correct)

Every civilization has attributes of every other civilization present within it; making it impossible to have authentic civilization clashes. (incorrect)

These are the basic semicolon rules; for more complex rules, please see Writing Center staff or several handbooks available in the JCCC Writing Center.

For exercises to practice your semicolon skills, please see Writing Center staff.