

What is a semi-colon?

A semi-colon can be used instead of a full stop between two related sentences. This links them together in a way a full stop doesn't.

A semicolon is a punctuation mark that looks like this ; when used correctly the semicolon can make writing clearer.

The semicolon can help you join closely connected ideas in a sentence.
It can also break up a list that contains longer phrases.

- Connecting ideas

The most common way to use a semicolon is to help join closely connected ideas in a sentence. These sections must be independent and complete sentences, but closely linked in some way:

'Sandip spent three hours in the library; he couldn't find the book he wanted.'

A semicolon is often used to replace a coordinating conjunction like 'and' or 'but'. The sentence about Sandip could have been written like this:

'Sandip spent three hours in the library but he couldn't find the book he wanted.'

- Conjunctive adverbs

A conjunctive adverb connects ideas in a sentence: however/but/instead/therefore/meanwhile etc instead

If a conjunctive adverb is used to link two sentences, a semicolon must be used before the conjunctive adverb:

'Sandip spent three hours in the library; however he couldn't find the book he wanted.'

Breaking up a list

- Semicolons can also be used when writing a more complicated list. '

'When I pack for school, I make sure I have my calculator, compasses and ruler for maths and science lessons; drawing pencils, with coloured pastels, for art; shin pads, goalie gloves and boots for football; and my bus money.'

The semicolons are added to signal to the reader which objects are grouped together and make the overall list clearer.