

# SEMICOLONS AND SEMICOLON USAGE

# REVIEW

- In the previous lesson, you learned how to join or coordinate two independent clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction.
- In this lesson, you'll learn another way of coordinating independent clauses – coordination using a semicolon instead of a comma/conjunction.

# TERMS AND CONCEPTS

What is a semicolon?

- This is a semicolon ;
- A semicolon joins two complete sentences. It is a very strong mark of punctuation, and can do all by itself what normally requires a comma plus a coordinating conjunction to accomplish.
- Effective semicolons add variety to sentence structure.
- They also emphasize cause and effect relationships.

# EXAMPLES

## Original Sentences:

- Lisa's cookies were delicious.
- The family consumed them in a single night.

## Combined:

- Lisa's cookies were delicious; the family consumed them in a single night.

# SEMICOLONS AND COORDINATION

How does a semicolon relate to coordination?

- A semicolon is a form of coordination, and can do the same thing that a comma and coordinating conjunction do.
- The following sentences are equally correct:
  - Jack sprints well, **but** he tires over distance.
  - Jack sprints well; he tires over distance.

# WHEN NOT TO USE

A semicolon is a form of coordination – it is not a form of subordination! It is not OK to use a semicolon to join an independent and dependent clause.

- Incorrect: **When I started dancing (dep.);** I hurt my back within the week. (indep.)
- Correct: I started dancing (indep.); I hurt my back within the week. (indep.)

# WHEN NOT TO USE

*Question:*

Is it OK to join sentences or independent clauses of differing lengths?

*Answer:*

No. The two clauses must be fairly equal in length and grammatical weight.

- Incorrect: Joe and Amy worked as hard as they could to get the tree up in time; Shad ate the popcorn strings.
- Correct: Joe and Amy worked as hard as they could to get the tree up in time; Shad leisurely ate the popcorn strings that were supposed to go on the tree.

# PLAYGROUND ANALOGY

*Riddle:*

How are a semicolon and a teeter-totter alike?

*Answer:*

Both involve balance. When a hefty child gets on one end of a teeter-totter and a skinny child gets on the other, nobody has much fun. The hefty child is stuck down on the ground and the skinny one is stuck in the air.

The same principle applies to the semicolon. In order for the sentence to be balanced, what comes before the semicolon should be the same length and grammatical “weight” as what comes after it.



# Grammar of Playgrounds

