

Perhaps the most common semicolon mistake is using the punctuation mark when it is not needed.

Use Semicolons as Follows:

Link two or more related independent clauses with a semicolon unless they are already joined by a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

Wise men don't need advice; fools don't take it.

-Benjamin Franklin

Use a semicolon (instead of a usual comma) to precede a coordinating conjunction when a sharp division between the two independent clauses is desired.

Politicians may refrain from negative campaigning for a time; but when the race gets close, they can't seem to resist trying to dredge up personal dirt to use on their opponent.

Before conjunctive adverbs (*therefore, nevertheless, however, instead, thus, then*) when they come between independent clauses. Place a comma after it.

Bob Hope started his entertainment career in Vaudeville; however, he made his major mark as a film star and television comic.

To separate items in a series that contain commas or other punctuation. This makes complicated sentences easier to read.

Bob Hope's films include Road to Morocco, which also features Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour; The Paleface, a comic western with Jane Russell as Calamity Jane; and The Seven Little Foys, a biography about vaudeville performer, Eddie Foy, Sr.