**Using the Semicolon**

A **semicolon** is used to join two independent clauses *that are closely related in meaning*.

Examples: I called Louis. He will be here in ten minutes.

I called Louis; he will be here in ten minutes.

The gym is on the ground floor. The classrooms are above it.

The gym is on the ground floor; the classrooms are above it.

A tall, slender woman entered the room. A short woman followed her.

**DIRECTIONS:** Rewrite the following sentences using correct punctuation as necessary (semicolons, periods, capitalization). Remember, only use a semicolon when the two clauses are closely related in meaning.

1. some reptiles like a dry climate others prefer a wet climate
2. St. Augustine, Florida was the first European settlement in the United States the Spanish founded it in 1565
3. many of today’s office buildings look like glass boxes they appear to be made entirely of windows
4. scientists have explored almost all areas of the earth they are now exploring the floors of the oceans
5. our teacher took us on a field trip to the Air and Space Museum my father works at the lumber yard in Frederick

***Using Semicolons Correctly***

Semicolons have very specific uses and so are easy punctuation marks to use correctly. But there are a few rules to remember. In fact, there are only two occasions when you can use a semicolon:

• to join the clauses in a compound sentence

• to separate the items in a list or series when there are other punctuation marks within the items

themselves.

**Using Semicolons to Join Clauses**

It might be useful here for us to review for a minute what a clause is. As you recall, a clause is a group of

words that go together and that contains both a subject and a verb. When that clause also expresses a

complete thought, we call it an independent clause, and when we punctuate it with some kind of end

punctuation (period, question mark, exclamation mark) we call it a sentence. Sometimes when the ideas

expressed in the independent clauses are closely related, we might want to emphasize that relationship by

joining the clauses to create a compound sentence. There are several ways to do that correctly, and each has its advantages.

**Using the Semicolon with Conjunctive Adverbs**

Sometimes, we might want to join two independent clauses whose ideas are closely related, but related in

some other way than can be expressed adequately with *and*. For instance, let’s say there’s a cause and effect relationship between them.

\*\*\*\* (Please note, you should make sure you actually begin the second clause with a conjunctive adverb and not a subordinate conjunction, like *because, since*, etc., because using the subordinate conjunction changes the second clause from an independent clause to a dependent clause which can’t ever have the status of a sentence and can’t be punctuated with a semicolon. Some of the most commonly used conjunctive adverbs include *however, therefore, moreover, nonetheless, nevertheless, consequently, moreover, otherwise, and accordingly.*

**Using Semicolons in Lists and Series**

The other way we can use semicolons is to separate the items in a list or series when one or more of the

items already contain punctuation.

**Semicolon Use Practice Exercise 1**

Correct the following sentences by using the rules discussed above.

1. Because the party began at noon, we dropped Tom, Dave, and Ellen off at the store, they wanted to

shop for a present.

2. Nelda's hair looks better today than it did yesterday, however, it still needs work.

3. The floral arrangement needed more colors of roses, the bouquet didn't have enough contrast to it.

4. Her ribbons look beautiful on the tree, most people just use beads.

5. NASA wants to design a new space program. They don't have the funding.

6. Dictionaries don't always discuss the connotative meanings. Some meanings are defined by our

cultures.

7. I plan to visit my friends in Jacksonville, Florida, for the holidays. I may not be able to stay very

long.

8. The parents enjoy watching the game, moreover, they enjoy the half-time show.

9. Alex placed his order for a new suit, nonetheless, he wanted a quality outfit.

10. Lawyers reviewed the case for problems, they didn't find any.

11. Magazines usually have interesting articles, however; that one is boring.

12. Sarah almost ran the red light; but stopped in time.

13. Because the school let the children out early; I won't be able to attend the meeting.

14. Although that event usually takes place the first week of February; I think they scheduled it for

March this year.

15. She drives two vehicles; one that is sporty and one that gets good gas mileage.

16. Jake hired the new employee; who later became his boss.

17. Parents usually set curfews for their teenagers; who usually resent being told when to come home.

18. While the problem seems to have gone away; we're still looking for possible causes.

19. The room looks darker than usual, it needs more lamps.

20. The wizard wore a purple gown with gold stars on it, however; his presentation wasn't very

dramatic.