

Semicolons, hyphens and dashes

SEMICOLONS ;

Use semicolons

Between independent clauses when a coordinating conjunction is absent.

Coordinating conjunctions are connecting words such as “and,” “but,” “for,” and “yet.”

We carried our raft from the river to the parking lot; it was very heavy.

I hope it doesn't rain today; I just washed my car.

The agreement will give Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho virtual independence; Palestinians elsewhere on the West Bank will gain control over their daily lives through an elected government while the territories' final status is negotiated.

Use semicolons

Between items in a series that have commas inside the items.

The study looked at three surgical procedures: cardiac catheterization, in which a fine tube is inserted into the heart to investigate its condition; angioplasty, in which a balloon is introduced to constricted blood vessels in an attempt to widen them and clear blockages; and coronary artery bypass surgery, in which doctors reroute blood past blocked arteries.

He leaves his wife, Doris; a son, John Smith of Fullerton; three daughters: Jane Olson of Whittier, Mary Smith of Anaheim and Gail Moore of Denver; three grandchildren; and one great-grandson.

Use semicolons

Before a conjunctive adverb that is linking two independent clauses in a sentence.

Some conjunctive adverbs:

consequently, furthermore, hence, however, incidentally, indeed

The second study was a nationwide examination of nearly 430,000 patients at Pittsburgh Veterans Affairs Medical Center; however, the result was even more disturbing.

Hyphens and Dashes

Hyphen (-)

Hyphens connect prefixes and suffixes to their root word.

They also connect words that are compound modifiers.

Hyphens:

a pre-election rally

a walk-up apartment

a small-business owner

hazardous-waste removal

Dashes (—)

Use the en dash (—), which is the width of the letter *n*.

The longer em dash (—), which is the width of the letter *m*, is used on Web pages but never in newspapers.

Use dashes to denote an abrupt change in thought in a sentence or to indicate an emphatic pause.

Use en dashes to offset phrases with commas in the middle of a sentence.

wrong: Three of the Marx Brothers, Groucho, Harpo and Chico, starred in a movie with Marilyn Monroe.

right: Three of the Marx Brothers – Groucho, Harpo and Chico – starred in a movie with Marilyn Monroe.

Use en dashes in datelines.

PORTLAND, Maine – Two cargo ships collided in the ...

Use en dashes to denote an abrupt change in thought in a sentence or to indicate an emphatic pause.

Smith offered a plan – it was unprecedented – to raise revenues.

I am going to South Korea next year – if the political unrest subsides.