Semicolons (;)

Semicolons separate two complete statements that are closely related. As a general rule, if a period will not work, neither will a semicolon. Semicolons also separate items in a series or equal parts of a sentence.

Rule #1:

Use a semicolon to show a close relationship between two complete statements when a period would be too much of an interruption.

Example of Rule #1:

We should go shopping today; Macy's has a sale.

Rule #2:

As an alternative to a comma and a coordinating conjunction (F.A.N.B.O.Y.S.—for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so), use a semicolon to separate two complete statements. Always use a semicolon if one of the statements has commas within it.

Examples of Rule #2:

John drove to town; Sue went with him.
John drove to town, and Sue went with him.
Our marketing director, Diane Jones, needs an assistant; but she will be unable to interview applicants until her return from Alaska on June 7.

Rule #3:

Use a semicolon to separate two complete statements that contrast or show cause and effect. As an alternative, you can make two sentences.

Examples of Rule #3:

We did not meet our long–term goals; we did meet our short–term goals.
No one came to the meeting; it was not scheduled at a convenient time.

Rule #4:

Use a semicolon between complete statements separated by transitional words or phrases such as however, in fact, in other words, therefore, or nevertheless. Use a comma after the transitional word or phrase.

Example of Rule #4:

Zac graduated with honors; therefore, he was eligible for several scholarships.

Rule #5:

If items in a series contain internal commas, use a semicolon to separate the items.
Example of Rule #5:

We opened new offices in Dallas, Texas; Seattle, Washington; and San Diego, California.