Semicolon Cheat Sheet
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Semicolons are often used to join parts of a sentence together to establish variety and link related ideas. Unlike a colon, which separates an independent clause from descriptive information, a semicolon links independent clauses of equal standing. Below are some helpful tips on how to use semicolons effectively and appropriately to strengthen sentence structure and variety.

When to Use a Semicolon

- When joining two closely related independent clauses into one compound sentence:

  *Deadpool is a snarky assassin within the Marvel universe; he is affectionately known as the “Merc with a Mouth.”*

  - In this example, notice how a comma and a conjunction (e.g. *and*) or a period could take the place of the semicolon, but the semicolon implies a stronger connection between the two clauses.

  It is important to use a semicolon whenever the conjunction has been left out since inserting a comma alone will create a *comma splice* (two independent clauses joined together as if one is a dependent clause):

  *Deadpool is a snarky assassin within the Marvel universe, he is affectionately known as the “Merc with a Mouth.”*

  - Using a comma here disrupts the reader it implies a relationship between the two independent clauses that is not accurate.

- When using a transitional expression such as *therefore, for instance, furthermore, in addition, as a result*, etc. to link independent clauses:

  *Though he was first introduced as a super-villain in the Marvel universe, Deadpool has evolved into an antihero that often breaks the fourth wall; as a result, comic writers often give Deadpool humorous and playful dialogue.*

  *As a hardened mutant assassin, Deadpool can’t afford to fear death; therefore, he courts the personification of death, Lady Death, on several occasions.*

  - Though the transitional phrase/expression in the above examples directly follows the semicolon, note that the semicolon still goes *between the clauses* even if the expression appears in the middle or at the end of the second independent part:
Deadpool will often serenade Lady Death and try to sweep her off her feet; Lady Death, however, often leads him into comical traps and abandons him in awkward social situations.

- To prevent confusion when listing items in a series with internal punctuation:

  Deadpool has clashed with other heroes and villains in cities like San Francisco, California; New York, New York; and El Paso, Texas.

  - Without the semicolons to separate the cities like this, the reader has to manage the pairings, creating a potential lack of clarity. With the semicolons at the major breaks between states, the writer helps the reader maintain distinctions.

When **Not** to Use a Semicolon

- When separating an independent clause from a dependent clause or introducing a series/list—**use a comma instead**:

  Deadpool’s mutant power is his incredible healing factor, which allows him to withstand injuries beyond normal human capacity.

  Deadpool’s arsenal includes a variety of different weapons: katanas, assault rifles, knives, grenades, and banana cream pies.

- When using a conjunction like *and, but, for, yet, so,* etc. to connect independent clauses. **A comma is required with the conjunction:**

  Deadpool’s allegiances often change by the hour, but he always puts his motivations first.

- Between an appositive that is directly followed by the word that the appositive refers to—**use a comma:**

  Deadpool will often team up with Cable, a mutant freedom fighter from the future and the son of Scott Connors and Jean Grey.