

# Grammar: semi-colons

## With the Writing Development Centre

**Semi-colons are used to indicate connections between different parts of a sentence in the circumstances outlined below.**

### Separating items in a complex list

Within complex lists, each item may consist of more than one word and a semi-colon helps to separate the items clearly.

For example:

The publications about the North East focus on several areas: arts, culture and museums; leisure and tourism; the history of mining, shipbuilding and heavy industry.

### Linking two closely connected sentences

Often used to fix run-on sentences, semi-colons are used in place of a full stop or linking word (a coordinating conjunction, such as 'and', 'but' and 'or') and must be preceded and followed by a complete sentence. Therefore, each half should be capable of standing alone as a complete sentence.

For example:

There is a lack of literature about Newcastle; there are some recent publications about the North East

However, the alternative is still suitable: There is a lack of literature about Newcastle but there are some recent publications about the Northeast.

When thinking about whether to use semi-colons, other issues may come into consideration: the grammatical accuracy of the sentence; the length and complexity of the sentence; the accessibility of the key point for the reader.

If your semi-colon cannot be replaced with an "and" or a full stop, then it is likely that you have used it incorrectly.

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