Semicolons

1. Focus

Explain Semicolons

Say: We know that a period and comma are types of punctuation. A semicolon looks like a combination of a period and a comma. It can separate complete thoughts much as a period does. Writers use semicolons between independent clauses if they are not joined by and, but, for, nor, or, so, or yet. An independent clause is a statement that can stand on its own. You use a semicolon to separate independent clauses that are linked in some way by subject.

Model Using Semicolons

Display the following text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources and read it aloud to students.

She was actually a widow; she was called by her dead husband’s name.

Modeling Text

Say: Look at the first part of the sentence before the semicolon. “She was actually a widow” is an independent clause with a subject and a verb. It is a sentence that can stand by itself. “She was called by her dead husband’s name” is also an independent clause. It, too, is a sentence that can stand by itself. But the two independent clauses are very connected. They are both about the widow. The semicolon in this sentence separates two complete thoughts whose meanings are related to each other. Writers use semicolons in their writing when they don’t want to use a period between two related thoughts.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Semicolons

Display the practice text (without revisions) on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Ask students to combine the two independent clauses with a semicolon in each item. (Students do not need to copy the sentences.)

1. He worked the statue’s rough stumps into feet with toes; then he engraved lines.
2. This morning Ditanu was perfectly happy; a breeze blew through the window, cooling him.

Practice Text

If your class includes English language learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Sentences with Correct Placement of Semicolons

Invite volunteers to come to the chart and insert semicolons where needed in each sentence. Be sure that students use lowercase letters at the beginning of the second independent clause. Discuss their choices as a class. Ask students the following questions:

• What are the independent clauses in each sentence?
• Where do I put the semicolon?
• Why does it make sense to use a semicolon instead of a period between these independent clauses?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that a semicolon can act as a period in separating two complete thoughts. Remember to use semicolons in your writing when you want to separate two complete thoughts instead of using a period. You should use a semicolon only when the two independent clauses are related to each other in subject.

If you would like to give students additional practice using semicolons in sentences, have them complete BLM 10.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share their answers to BLM 10. Provide corrective feedback as necessary. Ask students to review what they learned about semicolons.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Beginning ELs are not ready to work on this English conventions skill. While other students collaborate on the practice activity or write independently, meet one on one with students and continue to support developmentally appropriate language, grammar, and conventions based on students’ language levels.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair EL students with fluent English speakers during the practice activity. Provide the following sentence frame to assist students in describing the independent clauses:

_______ is an independent clause.

Pair students with fluent English speakers to complete BLM 10.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share this English/Spanish cognate: independent/independiente.