

Words of Wisdom: The Semicolon

January, 2011

By Shari Broussard, Vice-President

Rule 1 – Do not capitalize after a semicolon unless the word always needs to be capped. Leave just one space after a semicolon.

Example: Amber Dill was a court reporter; Brian was an attorney.

The music on the radio was loud; therefore, she did not hear the sirens.

Rule 2 – Use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses when there is no conjunction of any kind joining the clauses and when the construction is grammatically parallel.

Example: She made \$300 on the deposition; he made \$1,000 on the hearing.

Rule 3 – Use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses when there is no conjunction of any kind joining the clauses and when the ideas stated are very closely related.

Example: The arm was broken in two places; is that correct?

Rule 4 – Use a semicolon or a period in front of a conjunctive adverb.

Example: She had previously covered the trial; therefore, her dictionary was good.

Rule 5 – Use a comma after a conjunctive adverb that has two or more syllables.

Example: The exhibits were mailed; however, the office did not receive them.

Rule 6 – Use no punctuation after a conjunctive adverb that has only one syllable.

Example: I started the transcript on Monday; yet I didn't finish it.

Rule 7 – When there is a coordinate conjunction preceding the word that can be a conjunctive adverb, use the punctuation appropriate for the coordinate conjunction, not the conjunctive adverb punctuation.

Example: He had the appropriate experience, but yet he could not handle the arbitration.

The bank had foreclosed; but, however, we still hoped to save the house.

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Rule 8 – If the word that can be a conjunctive adverb is in the position out in the front of the sentence but does not have an independent subject and verb after it, use a comma in front of it, not a period or a semicolon.

Example: The trucks were waiting to be filled, therefore were not able to make deliveries.

Rule 9 – Change the comma before the coordinate conjunction in a compound sentence to a semicolon when there are other marks of punctuation in the sentence that tend to “hide” or “obscure” the comma before the conjunction.

Example: The three of them - - Vicky, Christie and Ashlee - - handled the trial; but Betsy, who handled the schedule, coordinated the dates.

Rule 10 – In a series where there are commas separating the series and where one member of the series has internal punctuation - - that is, punctuation within it - - use a semicolon to separate each member of the series.

Example: She worked for Esquire; Capital Reporting Company, which was her favorite; and Davis Reporting.

Rule 11 – Separate each member of the series with the same type of punctuation.

Example: Betsy sent the confirmations to Miller; Reiner; Perkovich, who is in Chicago; Brunet; Walle; and Todd.