Semicolons

Semicolons provide readers with a pause between two related independent clauses. There are only three reasons to use a semicolon:

1. Linking two closely related independent clauses: When you have a strong or even subtle connection between two independent clauses, you may link those clauses with a semicolon.

    - Examples:
        1. No one heard the policeman's warning; one by one they fell into the sinkhole.
        2. We heard the tree limbs snap and fall to the ice covered ground; there was nothing we could do to save our trees.

2. Linking two independent clauses joined by a conjunctive adverb or transitional expression: Common conjunctive adverbs: *moreover, therefore, however,* and *indeed.* Common transitional phrases: *in addition, in fact,* and *for example*.

    - Examples:
        1. I love the long, cold winter months**;** however, I still look forward to spring.
        2. The small car had much more room than I had imagined; in fact, there was enough room for all five us to comfortably drive to the hotel.

3. Linking two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction in which one or both of the clauses have commas, or the clauses or phrases are long.

    - Examples:
        1. The doctors said that John could not eat any pork, creamy sauces, or fried foods; that he had to quit smoking, drinking, and taking over the counter pain meds; and finally that John had to exercise, lift weights, and sleep eight hours a night if he wanted to live to see his sixtieth birthday.
        2. The commission found that company funds were channeled to special accounts; that the company executives were paying for their extravagant life styles with lavish expense accounts; and that the employees' retirement account had been used to fund personal international trips.

Note, when you use a semicolon to link two sentences separated by either a coordinating conjunction or a transitional phrase, the semicolon is placed after the last word of the first independent clause followed by the conjunctive adverb or transitional phrase then a comma.