The Semicolon

The semicolon is used to connect major sentence elements of equal grammatical rank. A semicolon cannot be used if one of the elements is not a complete sentence.

1. **Use a semicolon between closely related independent clauses not joined by a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *or*, *for*, *nor*, *so*, and *yet*).**
    - *I have not worn this coat in many years; I'm surprised it still fits.* (Correct)
    - *I have not worn this coat in many years; yet it still fits.* (Incorrect, contains a coordinating conjunction)
    - *I have not worn this coat in many years; which still fits.* (Incorrect, the element following the semicolon is not a complete sentence)

2. **Use a semicolon between independent clauses linked with a transitional expression.**
    Transitional expressions might include conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases.

    - *The idea of a norm only has merit in a statistical sense; moreover, we have no agreed upon definition of mental health.* (Correct)
    - *The idea of balance serves many as an ideal of mental health; even so, one is left with the question of what to balance.* (Correct)
    - *The concept of bipolar personality disorder might be seen as a balance; although usually not as health.* (Incorrect, the second element is not an independent clause)

3. **Use a semicolon between items in a series containing internal punctuation.**
    - *Present at the conference were Jack Stone, the Joyce scholar; Ellie Ragland, the specialist in psychoanalysis; and Deborah Vint, whose work on Byron is well known.*

4. **<u>Do not</u> use a semicolon**
    - **Between a subordinate clause and the rest of a sentence**
      <u>Given the number of invitations we sent out</u>; one hundred participants is exceptional. (Incorrect, the underlined phrase is not independent)
    - **Between an appositive and word it refers to**
      Many critics compare Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* to *Lifeboa*t; <u>one of his earliest films</u>. (Incorrect, the underlined phrase cannot stand alone and merely serves to define the title *Lifeboat*)
    - **To introduce a list**
      My favorite chefs are listed on the *FoodTV* website; Emeril, Ming Tsi, and Wolfgang Puck. (Incorrect, use a colon in place of the semicolon)
    - **Between independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions**
      Preparing *crème caramel* does not require a blow torch; but it tastes like *crème brulé*. (Incorrect, a comma before *but* correctly punctuates two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction)