Semicolon:
THE AUDIBLE PAUSE

Purpose:

- Indicates a pause that is longer than a comma but shorter than the complete stop of a period.
- Cannot be used in place of a colon.
- Can be used as a connector between closely related sentences.
Rule 1

- A semicolon can replace a period if the writer wishes to narrow the gap between two closely linked sentences.

Examples:
- Call me tomorrow; you can give me the answer then.
- We have paid our dues; we expect all the privileges listed in the contract.

Rule 2

- Use a semicolon before such words and terms as namely, however, therefore, that is, i.e., for example, e.g., for instance, etc., when they introduce a complete sentence. It is also preferable to use a comma after these words and terms.

Example:
- Bring any two items; however, sleeping bags and tents are in short supply.

Rule 3

- Use a semicolon to separate units of a series when one or more of the units contain commas.

Incorrect:
- The conference has people who have come from Moscow, Idaho, Springfield, California, Alamo, Texas, Tennessee and other places as well.

NOTE: that with only commas, the sentence is hopelessly confusing.
Correct:

- The conference has people who have come from Moscow, Idaho; Springfield, California; Alamo, Texas; and other places as well.

Rule 4

- A semicolon may be used between independent clauses joined by a connector, such as and, but, or, nor, etc., when one or more commas appear in the first clause.

Example:

- When I finish here, and I will soon, I’ll be glad to help you; and that is a promise I will keep.

Resources

The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation by Jane Straus.