



Uni-edit English Writing Tip: Semi-colons for monster lists

Level of difficulty: Medium

Your research reports often include long lists of complex items. Sometimes using commas only is insufficient to offset the items. Here is an example:

Incorrect: We had four professors on our committee: Peter Wursthorn, Professor of Mathematics, Ronald Pepin, Professor of English, Cynthia Greenblatt, Professor of Education, and Nada Light, Professor of Nursing.

As each item already includes a comma, separate the items using semi-colons. You can think of semi-colons as big commas in this situation.

Correct: We had four professors on our committee: Peter Wursthorn, Professor of Mathematics; Ronald Pepin, Professor of English; Cynthia Greenblatt, Professor of Education; and Nada Light, Professor of Nursing.

Here is another example:

Incorrect: The participants in the first group scored 70 points, the second, 60, and the third, 40.

Correct: The participants in the first group scored 70 points; the second, 60; and the third, 40.

End of tip