



GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

Using the Colon and Semicolon

USING THE COLON

The colon is used after an independent clause to introduce or direct attention to information that provides further explanation or balance to the sentence. Unlike the semicolon, the information that follows a colon does not have to be in the form of an independent clause. In addition, the colon has conventional uses to separate certain elements. Note that both the colon and semicolon are followed by a single space.

Use a colon to introduce:

- a list (when the list is not grammatically essential to the introductory wording)

Camper s are expected to provide the following: sheets, blankets, and towels.

The supplies provided by campers include sheets, blankets, and towels. (Since the list is the object of the verb "include," a colon is not used.)

- a block quotation (a long quotation of one or more paragraphs that is indented from the body of the rest of the text)
- an appositive (nouns or noun phrases that rename nouns or pronouns)

King Midas cared for only one thing: gold.

- a formal question or quotation that is independent from the sentence (depending on the academic discipline, the first word after the colon may or may not be capitalized)

The question is: what is to be done?

He opened the meeting with the words: "War is upon us!"

- a clause following a sentence that explains the sentence

His motives are clear: he intends to become a dictator.

Use a colon to separate the following elements:

- the salutation of a business letter (Dear Ms. Weiner:) or memorandum (To: Deborah Weiner)
- a title and subtitle (*Principles of Mathematics: An Introduction*)
- a biblical citation by chapter and verse (Luke 3:4–13)

- a time notation in hours and minutes (8:15 p.m. or P.M.)
- a proportion (a ratio of 2:1)
- a citation in bibliographies to separate city of publication and publisher (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill)
- a script of a play or film to separate the name of a character from her/his lines (Macbeth: She should have died hereafter; / There would have been a time for such a word.

Do not use a colon directly after a verb, a preposition, or expressions that usually indicate items in a series (such as, for example, especially, including).

USING THE SEMICOLON

The semicolon is used between closely related independent clauses that are grammatically equivalent and not joined with a coordinating conjunction. In the example below, the semicolon is interchangeable with a period. When you use a semicolon, you should be sure that the relationship between the two clauses is clear.

Use a semicolon:

- between two independent clauses that are not joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet).

People are usually willing to give advice; they are much less inclined to take it.

- between two independent clauses that are joined by a conjunctive adverb, such as “however,” “nevertheless,” “furthermore,” “then,” “therefore,” “moreover,” “thus,” or by a transitional phrase, such as “after all,” “as a result,” “for example,” “in addition,” “on the other hand.”

Every culture has its own ways of indicating politeness; however, a person from a different culture may fail to recognize such indicators.

- to join independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction if each clause contains commas that might cause confusion

Today, people can buy what they want from supermarkets, department stores, and discount stores; but in Colonial days, when such conveniences did not exist, people depended on general stores and peddlers.

- between items in a series when the items contain commas.

The newly elected officers of the group are Thomas Mann, president; Emily Dickinson, vice-president; James Joyce, secretary; and Leo Tolstoy, treasurer.