



Semicolons & Colons

WHAT ARE SEMICOLONS & COLONS?

A semicolon (;) is used to connect major sentence elements of equal grammatical rank.

A colon (:) is used to call attention to the words that follow it.

RULES FOR USING SEMICOLONS

1. USE A SEMICOLON BETWEEN CLOSELY RELATED INDEPENDENT CLAUSES

a. Usually independent clauses are connected with commas and coordinating conjunctions (and, but nor, for, so yet), but if the relation is clear without the coordinating conjunction, then a semicolon can be used in its place.

i. Example: In writing, long sentences create a smooth, graceful **tone**; short sentences do just the opposite.

2. USE A SEMICOLON BETWEEN INDEPENDENT CLAUSES LINKED WITH A TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSION

a. When a transitional expression is used between independent clauses, there is a semicolon before it and a comma after it.

i. Example: Many people prefer long sentences; **however**, I prefer short sentences.

3. USE A SEMICOLON BETWEEN ITEMS IN A SERIES CONTAINING INTERNAL PUNCTUATION

a. Semicolons are sometimes used to separate list items if the list items also contain commas to help readers identify the major and minor groupings.

i. Example: "Researchers point to key benefits of positive thinking: It leads to high self-esteem, especially in people who focus on their **achievements**; it helps make social interactions , such as those with co-workers, more **enjoyable**; and, most important, it results in better sleep and overall health" (Hacker and Sommers 459).



RULES FOR USING COLONS

1. USE A COLON AFTER AN INDEPENDENT CLAUSE TO DIRECT ATTENTION TO A LIST, A QUOTATION, OR A SUMMARY OR AN EXPLANATION

a. List: It was only after arriving in New York, that she realized she was missing some crucial travel **items**: comfortable walking shoes, a warm coat, and a phone charger.

b. Quotation: Consider the words of **Tyrion Lannister**: "A mind needs books like a sword needs a whetstone, if it is to keep its edge. That is why I read so much."

c. Summary or Explanation: They are all clearly **lying**: none of them can look you in the eye.

2. USE A COLON ACCORDING TO CONVENTION

a. Salutation in a letter: Dear Jon:

b. Hours and Minutes: 2:30 p.m.

c. Proportions: The ratio of sugar to flour is 1:1

d. Titles and Subtitles: *Patterns for College Writing: A Rhetorical Reader and Guide*

e. Chapter and Verse in Sacred Text: Ezekiel 25:17

