

THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS CENTER

at **Sam Houston**
STATE UNIVERSITY

Colons and Semicolons

Colons

Use a colon after an independent clause to draw attention to a list, an appositive (a list that defines a noun phrase), or a quotation.

Use a colon when listing multiple items, especially after the phrase “the following”

A typical day in the life of a camp counselor consists of the following: wake-up call; morning activities; lunch; teaching afternoon activities; dinner; and participating in evening activities.

A colon can be used as an appositive. You will typically find this setup at the end of a sentence.

Jennifer likes two out of the three boys in our class: Rocky and Steven.

Colons are also one of the ways to introduce directly quoted material.

Consider the words of Norton Juster: “It’s all in the way you look at things.”

Use a colon between independent clauses only if the second summarizes or explains the first.

Life is like a box of chocolates: You never know what you are going to get.

Note: When an independent clause follows a colon, it may begin with either a capital letter or a lowercase letter.

Use a colon after the salutation in a formal letter, to indicate hours and minutes, to show proportions, between a title and a subtitle, and between city and publisher in bibliographic entries.

Example: Dear Madam:

The game will begin at 7:00 p.m.

The ratio of Republicans to Democrats was 2:1

The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate

Davis, Anita. *What is a Book?* New York: Walker, 2002. Print.

Semicolons

Use a semicolon between independent clauses **not** joined by the following coordinating conjunctions: *and, but, or, nor, for, yet*.

Example: Yesterday the students prepared for the calculus test; they covered the first five chapters.

Writers should only use a semicolon in this instance if the two clauses are so closely related that a period would make too distinct a break between them.

Use a semicolon between independent clauses linked with such transitional expressions as: *for example, for instance, that is, besides, accordingly, moreover, nevertheless, furthermore, otherwise, therefore, however, consequently, instead, hence*.

Example: Some Victorian writers exhibit ambiguous attitudes toward women; for example, Wilkie Collins both elevates and criticizes the female sex in his novel *The Woman in White*.

If the transitional expressions mentioned above are found at the beginning of a clause and are clear interrupters, they should be followed by a comma. The transitional expressions *for example, for instance, and that is* are always followed by a comma. *However* is almost always followed by a comma.

Use a semicolon between items in a series if the items themselves contain commas.

Example: Legendary ballerinas of The New York City Ballet include Maria Tallchief, Principal Dancer from 1946 to 1960; Suzanne Farrell, Principal Dancer from 1965 to 1983; and Darci Kistler, Principal Dancer from 1982 to the present year.

Use a semicolon between items in a list that follows a colon.

Example: The 1996 Chicago Bulls had a steady starting line-up: Michael Jordan; Scottie Pippen; Ron Harper; Dennis Rodman; and Luc Longley.