

Punctuation - 3

Colons and Semicolons

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.

- 👉 A semicolon (rather than a comma) may be needed to separate independent clauses if there are already several commas within the clauses.

Example: *Chaos, the new club off Westheimer, announced they will have Ladies' Night, Teens' Night, and Singles' Night each week; and the public anticipation has been, not surprisingly, very strong.*

- 👉 If there are only one or two commas in the independent clauses, the semicolon is not needed; a comma would sit before the coordinating conjunction as usual. If, however, there are so many commas that the reader might have trouble discerning where one independent clause ends and another begins (as is the case above), a semicolon is appropriate.

- 👉 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 semicolon.

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

The Colon

- 👉 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.

Example:

A List:

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

An Appositive:

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

A Quotation:

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.

Example: *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 biographic entries.

Examples:

Dear Madam:

7:00 p.m.

The ratio of Republicans to Democrats was 2:1