

Semicolons

- Use a semicolon to separate two related independent clauses (clauses that can stand as sentences on their own) not linked by a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, for, nor, or, yet, and so*).

Jill did three hours of homework today; Jen did five-and-a-half.

- Use a semicolon to separate two related independent clauses linked by an adverb (*however, therefore, nevertheless, etc.*).

My doctor told me to avoid heavy lifting; nevertheless, I helped Bill move the piano.

- Use semicolons to separate items in a complex series.

A complex series contains internal punctuation. Semicolons help to clearly mark the break between each item in the series.

Today I met Linda, who is tall; Fred, who is a biology major; Amy, who likes to swim; and John, who has brown hair.

- Do NOT use a semicolon between an independent and a dependent clause.

A comma is the appropriate punctuation between a dependent and independent clause.

WRONG: If you toss me the keys; I'll open up the trunk.

RIGHT: If you toss me the keys, I'll open up the trunk.

- Semicolons go outside quotation marks.

Hank told me, "I don't like cheese"; I think he's crazy.

Colons

- Use a colon to introduce a list.

The clause preceding the colon must be an independent clause (it can stand on its own as a sentence).

WRONG: My mother told me to buy: a box of crackers, a cake of soap, a package of toilet paper, a head of lettuce, and a sack of flour.

RIGHT: My mother told me to buy five things at the store: a box of crackers, a cake of soap, a package of toilet paper, a head of lettuce, and a sack of flour.

- Use a colon to introduce an appositive (a phrase used to describe or define a noun).

Elsa had a thought: what if she walked *around* the mountain, instead of over it?

- **Use a colon to set off a second independent clause that modifies the first.**

Aaron was happy today: he hopped and skipped all the way to the post office.

- **Use colons to introduce quotations after an independent clause.**

WRONG: Jodie said: "I think you are the coolest person I know."

RIGHT: Jodie told me a secret: "I think you are the coolest person I know."

- **Use colons in titles.**

Procrastination: The Art of Wasting Time

- **Use colons in business letters and memoranda.**

In business letters and memos, colons are used in salutations (*Dear Mr. Soandso:*) and in memo headings (*To:*, *From:*, *Date:*, *Subject:*, *Dist:*).

- **Use colons in numbers and addresses.**

Colons are used for Biblical citations to separate chapter from verse (*Mark 4:12*), in clock times to separate hours from minutes (*8:56 a.m.*), in ratios (*4:1*), and in website addresses (*http://www.sparknotes.com*).

## **Dashes**

A dash is typed as two hyphens. There should be no space between a dash and the words on either side.

- **Use dashes to highlight extra informational comments.**

Helga's strict rules—as well as her delicious schnitzel—are known for miles around.

- **Use dashes to set off important or surprising points.**

Jonah just ate a million donuts—literally.

- **Use only one dash or pair of dashes per sentence.**

WRONG: Sylvia—my favorite person—except for maybe Jed—in the whole world—is giving a tap dancing recital, and I am going to buy her flowers—I'm her best friend, you know.

RIGHT: Sylvia—one of my favorite people in the whole world—is giving a tap dancing recital, and I am going to buy her flowers, because I'm her best friend.