

24 Semicolons, Colons

1. SEMICOLONS (;) TO SEPARATE

Semicolons are used primarily to separate various parts of the sentence. They are frequently confused with colons, but their purpose is so different that there really should be no problem. Remember, colons are used mainly to introduce a listing of any kind. Semicolons are never used for that purpose.

- Use the semicolon to join two complete thoughts that are closely related and not separated by *and*, *but*, *or*, *for*. In this usage, the semicolon takes the place of the connecting word and comma.

My father was born in Russia, and then he escaped to the United States.

My father was born in Russia; then he escaped to the United States.

- A semicolon can also take the place of a period between two complete thoughts that are related:

No one believes we shall ever send men to Mars. The problems and cost appear too difficult.

No one believes we shall ever send men to Mars; the problems and cost appear too difficult.

EXERCISES

On separate paper, rewrite the following sentences by using semicolons instead of periods and connecting words.

1. The doctor examined the young pregnant woman. Then, with a twinkle in his eye, he announced that she would have twins.
2. The captain accepted the medal for bravery, but he knew in his heart that he didn't deserve it.
3. Evan lifted weights each day to strengthen his leg muscles, and within a few weeks he could walk again.
4. Having a dog for a pet is a great responsibility. It needs constant love, care, and guidance.
5. I was surprised at how well my uncles were behaving at our Thanksgiving dinner. Before the end of the evening though, they were arguing bitterly as usual.

2. SEMICOLONS WITH CERTAIN WORDS

A semicolon is also used frequently before the following words when these words introduce complete thoughts: accordingly, also, anyhow, besides, consequently, furthermore, hence, however, indeed, instead, likewise, moreover, nevertheless, still, then, therefore, thus, for example, in fact, in other words, on the contrary, on the other hand. *Examples:*

The race was scheduled to begin at 8 a.m.; accordingly she began to warm up at 7:00 a.m.

Little Ted was born with a severe physical handicap; nevertheless, everyone loved him for his warm personality.

Jean never made up for her lack of formal education; consequently, she was always at a disadvantage in seeking employment.

Hint: A period is also effective in place of the semicolon in the sentences above.

EXERCISES

Correct each of the following sentences by placing a semicolon where needed.

1. My parents never took an interest in my education, for example, they never asked what I was studying.
2. Tom didn't like the idea of washing the dishes, however, he had no choice.
3. Steven couldn't find a job after he graduated from college, therefore, he joined the Air Force.
4. I begged my brother to stop smoking, but he refused, consequently, today he is a very sick man.
5. My friends and I decided not to go camping, instead we rented a houseboat.

3. SEMICOLONS BETWEEN ITEMS IN SERIES

Use semicolons—instead of commas—to separate items in a series when some items already have commas between them: The meetings to nominate new district representatives were held on Monday, August 3; Wednesday, August 5; and Saturday, August 8. During the last two years, I've lived in Manasquan, New Jersey; Lytle Creek, California; and Ames, Iowa.

EXERCISES

Add the needed semicolons to the following sentences.

1. His best friends were Dick Diver, the famous author, Wendy Everett, an automobile mechanic, and Tim Wesley, a real estate agent.
2. Most movie fans know that Joan Crawford was talented, witty, and energetic, that she was a friend, mother, and wife to Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and that she had severe problems in dealing with her children.
3. He disliked his job as line foreman because he resented his boss, an unfriendly woman, because his hours, stretching from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., were too long, and because he had very little interest in many of his chores.
4. She was born on August 15, 1900, married on August 14, 1927, and died on August 13, 1978.
5. Our trip took us through Miami, Florida, Athens, Georgia, and Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

4. USES OF THE COLON (:)

- Use the colon to introduce a formal quotation:

Semicolons, Colons

In his article "Year of the Flea," David Hendin writes:

Scientists are in conflict as to how much time the flea actually spends on its host animal. The traditional viewpoint is that fleas hop in—they neither walk or fly—and ride—for about 10 percent of their lives, doing so only to snatch a free blood meal and to copulate. . . .

- Use the colon to introduce any long listing of objects, persons, or phrases: The Olympics stress several sports: swimming, gymnastics, wrestling, track events, and boating. The student looked confused when he examined the choice of courses offered by his college: literature, writing, typing, accounting, mathematics, science, and language.

- Use a colon after a formal letter salutation: Dear Sir: Dear Madam: Gentlemen: Sirs:

But use a comma after an informal one: Dear Mary,

- Use a colon in Biblical references, between chapter and verse: Exodus 5:10.

- Use a colon between the hour and the minutes in telling time: 6:32 p.m. (note: no space before or after colon if the numbers are typewritten).

- Use the colon to tell the reader that you want to shift his or her attention to the words that come after the colon: There can be no question about this: New York's subways are awful. All his efforts were directed toward one goal: graduation.

EXERCISES

Place colons where they are required in the following sentences.

1. In our travels through Europe this past summer, we visited countries England, France, and Germany.
2. In order to succeed in college, you need several essential qualities, self-discipline, self-pride, and a desire to achieve.
3. The grieving mother found solace in the Bible, especially in Ruth 1, 16.
4. Despite the severe snow storm, her plane landed on time at 7,30 p.m.
5. Dear Sir,
6. The philosopher Spinoza believed The mind's highest good is the knowledge of God, and the mind's highest virtue is to know God.
7. In meeting with the leaders of the countries in the Middle East, I am certain of only one thing war is inevitable.
8. Although the press and perhaps the jury have already found my client guilty, he wants only his rights a fair and impartial trial.
9. T. S. Eliot once wrote Only a person who dares to go too far can possibly find out how far he can go.
10. If you plan to go camping, you will need the following equipment a tent, a sleeping bag, a gas stove, and a flashlight.

Comma Splices

Comma splices are created when two or more independent clauses are joined with a comma and no coordinating conjunction.

List the coordinating conjunctions!

F-

A-

N-

B-

O-

Y-

S-

Add the conjunction:

*Hermione helped Ron and
Harry study for their exams,
she is such a good friend.*

“However” and “therefore” should not be used as coordinating conjunctions.

Harry uses his invisibility cloak mostly to sneak around Hogwarts, however there are times when he uses it to protect Ron and Hermione.

Semicolons and Colons

To quote the last Writing Lab grammar worksheet, semicolon and colons are not fancy commas.

Semicolons take the place of the comma and coordinating conjunction between two independent clauses.

Good: *Harry and Cedric represented Hogwarts in the Triwizard Tournament; Viktor Krum represent Durmstrang.*

Bad: *Harry dated Cho Chang for a while; even though he eventually wound up with Ginny Weasley.*

Here, the semicolon is used between an _____ and a _____ clause.

Colons are used after an independent clause to call attention to the words that follow them (often a list or explanation).

Good: *Consider the Sorting Hat's new song: "Oh you may not think me pretty, but don't judge on what you see. I'll eat myself if you can find a smarter hat than me."*

Bad: this example.