

# Semicolons and Colons

Skilled writers use semicolons and colons to signal readers about ideas that will follow. Semicolons tell readers that two closely related ideas should be thought of together. The semicolon is a stronger punctuation mark than a comma, which signals a pause; but the semicolon is not as strong as a period, which signifies a complete stop. Understanding the use of semicolons will help you avoid fundamental writing errors, such as the *comma splice* and the *run-on sentence*.

## Semicolon

### Independent Clauses Separated by Conjunctive Adverbs

Semicolons are used primarily when two independent clauses are separated by a conjunctive adverb or a transitional expression.

- Courtney wanted to improve her career opportunities; consequently, she went back to school.
- Companies make no profits until they recover costs; therefore, most companies use a cost approach in pricing.
- Mike rose from bag boy to vice president; thus, he knew every position well.

### Independent Clauses Without a Coordinating Conjunction or a Conjunctive Adverb

Two or more closely related independent clauses not separated by a conjunctive adverb or a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *for*, *so*, *or*, *nor*, *yet*) require a semicolon.

- Sales meetings during prosperous times were lavish productions that focused on entertainment; meetings today focus on training and motivation.
- Not all job openings are found in classified ads or in job databases; the “hidden” job market accounts for as many as two thirds of all available positions.

### Series Containing Internal Commas or Complete Thoughts

Semicolons are used to separate items in a series when one or more of the items contain internal commas.

- Only the company branches in Wilmington, Delaware; Tucson, Arizona; and Cincinnati, Ohio, are showing substantial profits.
- Attending the conferences were Georgia Mackh, executive vice president, Cabrillo Industries; Toni Cannizzaro, president, Santa Rosa Software; and Sandy Cornish, program director, Club Mediterranean.

Semicolons are used to separate three or more serial independent clauses.

- The first step consists of surveying all available information related to the company objective so that an understanding of all problems can be reached; the second step involves interviewing consumers, wholesalers, and retailers; and the third step consists of developing a research design in which the actual methods and procedures to be used are indicated.

## Colons

### Formally Listed Items

Use a colon after an independent clause that introduces one item, two items, or a formal list. A list may be shown vertically or horizontally and is usually introduced by such words as *the following*, *as follows*, *these*, or *thus*. A colon is also used when these words are implied but not stated.

- Creating a company Web site offered the following significant advantage: improved customer service.
- Some of the most commonly used manufacturers' discounts are the following: trade, cash, quantity, and seasonal.
- Our company uses several delivery services for our important packages: UPS, FedEx, and Airborne.
- These are a few of the services that a correspondent bank performs for other banks:
  1. Collecting checks, payments, and other credit instruments.
  2. Accepting letters of credit and travelers' checks.
  3. Making credit investigations.

Do not use a colon unless the list is introduced by an independent clause. Lists often function as sentence complements or objects. When this is the case and the statement introducing the list is incomplete, no colon should be used. It might be easiest to remember that lists introduced by verbs or prepositions require no colons because the introductory statement is incomplete.

- Three courses in this program are accounting, English, and Information Systems 210.
- Awards of merit were presented to Professor Loncorich, Ms. Harned, and Dr. Konishi

### Quotations

Use a colon to introduce long one-sentence quotations and quotations of two or more sentences.

- Consumer advocate Lori Nahama said: "Historically, in our private-enterprise economy, consumers determine what and how much is to be produced through their purchases in the market place; hence, the needs of consumers are carefully monitored by producers."

### Explanatory Sentences

Use a colon to separate two independent clauses if the second clause explains, illustrates, or supplements the first.

- The company's new directors faced a perplexing dilemma: they had to choose between declaring bankruptcy and investing more funds to recoup previous losses.
- The applicants for the position all exhibited one common trait: they were achievers who accepted nothing less than success.

### Other Uses of the Colon

- After the salutation of a business letter.

Dear Mr. Paniccia:      Dear Mike:

- In expressions of time to separate hours from minutes.

2:45 p.m.                  12:01 a.m.

- Between titles and subtitles.

*How: A Handbook for Office Professionals*

- Between place of publication and name of publisher.

Guffey, Mary Ellen. *Essentials of Business Communication*. Cincinnati: Thomson South-Western, 2004.

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### Directions

Add any necessary punctuation marks.

1. German shoppers generally bring their own plastic or cloth bags for groceries therefore they were unaccustomed to Wal-Mart's bagging techniques.
2. Greenland is the largest island in the world it is about ten times the size of Great Britain.
3. Buildings swayed lights flickered and dishes rattled.
4. Serving on the panel of experts are Pam Rippin marketing director Santa Rosa Associates Evelyn Katusak sales supervisor Broome Products and Carrie McFerron market analyst Tyler Enterprises.
5. Babies under six months old can breathe and swallow at the same time adults cannot do this.

6. Your account is now several months past due consequently it is impossible for us to grant you further extensions.
7. The shortest recorded reign of any monarch was that of Louis XIX of France it lasted only 15 minutes.
8. Every Christmas we hire a number of temporary office workers hence I am writing to you to make this announcement of job openings to your students.
9. Jeremy worked Jennifer supervised and Jean entertained.
10. Web advertising attempts to reach large international audiences television advertising is aimed at national or local audiences.
11. Three similar types of tropical storms with different names are cyclones typhoons and hurricanes.
12. Japan faces a serious economic threat its dependence on oil imports endangers its future economic growth.
13. Each balance sheet is a statement of assets liabilities and owners' equity.
14. Energy in country is supplied from a number of sources oil natural gas coal nuclear fission and hydropower.
15. Professor Marilyn Simonson asked that research reports contain the following sections introduction body summary and bibliography.
16. Warren Bennis said "The factory of the future will have only two employees, a man and a dog. The man will be there to feed the dog. The dog will be there to keep the man from touching the equipment."
17. Of all the discoveries and inventions in human history the four greatest are said to be these speech fire agriculture and the wheel.
18. Business letters generally include four parts date inside address body and closing.
19. When completing your resume be sure to include relevant activities for example intern experience work-study experience and volunteer work.
20. Many banks now offer automated transfers from savings to checking accounts that is money may be kept in an interest-bearing savings account until needed.