

The Colon

The colon is used primarily to call attention to the words that follow it. A colon must always be preceded by a full, independent clause. Leave only one space after a colon, not two.

1. Use a colon after an independent clause to direct attention to a list, an appositive, or a quotation.

- *Janet sorted the bobbins three ways: by color, by size and by type of thread.*
- *Chip is guilty of two of the seven deadly sins: gluttony and sloth.*
- *Consider the words of Nietzsche: "The word kills the thing."*

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

When an independent clause follows a colon, capitalizing the first letter is optional.

- *Faith is like love: it cannot be forced.*

3. Use a colon after the salutation in a formal letter, between hours and minutes, to show ratio or proportion, between title and subtitle, and between city and publisher in a bibliographical entry.

- Dear Sir or Madame:
- 7:25 P.M.
- The score at half-time was 3:1.
- *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*
- New York: Simon and Schuster

4. Do not use a colon

- **between a verb and its object.**

Some important vitamins found in carrots are: thiamine, niacin, vitamin A, and vitamin C (Incorrect).

- **between a preposition and its object**

The heart's two pumps each consist of: an upper chamber, or atrium, and a lower chamber, or ventricle (Incorrect).

- **after *such as*, *including*, or *for example***

Our garden included many herbs, such as: basil, thyme, oregano, chives, cilantro and parsley (Incorrect).

The Semicolon

The semicolon is used to connect major sentence elements of equal grammatical rank. A semicolon cannot be used if one of the elements is not a complete sentence.

1. Use a semicolon between closely related independent clauses not joined by a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, for, nor, so, and yet*).

- *I have not worn this coat in many years; I'm surprised it still fits.* (Correct)
- *I have not worn this coat in many years; yet it still fits.* (Incorrect, contains a coordinating conjunction)
- *I have not worn this coat in many years; which still fits.* (Incorrect, the element following the semicolon is not a complete sentence)

2. Use a semicolon between independent clauses linked with a transitional expression.

Transitional expressions might include conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases.

- *The idea of a norm only has merit in a statistical sense; moreover, we have no agreed upon definition of mental health.* (Correct)
- *The idea of balance serves many as an ideal of mental health; even so, one is left with the question of what to balance.* (Correct)
- *The concept of bipolar personality disorder might be seen as a balance; although usually not as health.* (Incorrect, the second element is not an independent clause)

3. Use a semicolon between items in a series containing internal punctuation.

- *Present at the conference were Jack Stone, the Joyce scholar; Ellie Ragland, the specialist in psychoanalysis; and Deborah Vint, whose work on Byron is well known.*

4. Do not use a semicolon

- **Between a subordinate clause and the rest of a sentence**
Given the number of invitations we sent out; one hundred participants is exceptional. (Incorrect, the underlined phrase is not independent)
- **Between an appositive and word it refers to**
Many critics compare Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* to *Lifeboat*; one of his earliest films. (Incorrect, the underlined phrase cannot stand alone and merely serves to define the title *Lifeboat*)
- **To introduce a list**
My favorite chefs are listed on the *FoodTV* website; Emeril, Ming Tsi, and Wolfgang Puck. (Incorrect, use a colon in place of the semicolon)
- **Between independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions**
Preparing *crème caramel* does not require a blow torch; but it tastes like *crème brûlée*. (Incorrect, a comma before *but* correctly punctuates two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction)