

## : COLONS :

Most colon usage joins two sentence parts together to indicate that the second part complements or elaborates upon the first part.

Typically, the part before the colon should be a complete sentence (or independent clause). Think of the portion following the colon as a redefinition of the first part, whether as a list, an actual definition, a quotation, or an explanation (which may or may not be a grammatically complete phrase).

### 1. Use a colon after an independent clause to introduce a list, quotation, definition, explanation, etc.

Examples I bought several items at the grocery store: tuna, grapes, bread, floss, and paper towels.  
[The list defines the “several items.”]

The character Hamlet speaks one of Shakespeare’s most famous lines: “To be, or not to be.”

[The quotation illustrates the “famous line.”]

I finally figured out who has been eating from my garden: a hungry family of deer!

[The phrase explains “who.”]

But NOT The groceries I got at the store were: tuna, grapes, bread, floss, and paper towels.  
[The clause preceding the colon cannot stand alone, and the colon separates the verb from its object, which should be avoided.]

In Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet says: “To be, or not to be.”

[When using a signal phrase instead of an independent clause to introduce a quotation, use a comma rather than a colon.]

A deer family: they are the culprits eating my vegetable garden!

[Generally, make sure the independent clause or complete sentence comes first to avoid a sentence fragment error.]

### 2. Use a colon for other conventions such as when writing time, ratios, business letter salutations, titles with subtitles, or bibliographic references.

Examples My alarm is set for 6:15 a.m. [Time]  
Our English class had a ratio of 3:1 male to female students. [Ratio]  
Dear Sir or Madam: [Business letter salutation]  
*Deep Culture: The Hidden Challenges of Global Living* [Title]  
Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s [Bibliographic publication city and publisher]

Colon content developed for the CGCC Writing Center from the following sources:

Hacker, Diana, and Nancy Sommers. *A Writer’s Reference*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2011. Print.

Johnson-Sheehan, Richard, and Charles Paine. *Writing Today: Brief Edition*. Boston: Longman, 2010. Print.

Maimon, Elaine P., Janice H. Peritz, and Kathleen Blake Yancey. *The McGraw-Hill Handbook*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010. Print.

## ; SEMICOLONS ;

The semicolon is a punctuation mark used mostly to indicate separation between grammatically independent parts of a sentence with related ideas. A semicolon signals a more significant division of sentence parts than a comma but not as strong of a division as a period. Semicolons are most commonly used in one of the following three situations.

1. **To join two independent clauses (or complete sentences) that are not already connected by a joining word (or conjunction) such as *and, but, or, nor, yet, for, or so.***

Examples The chemistry lab blew up; Professor Thomas was fired.

Sarah bought a universal remote for her television; she no longer has to use five different remote controls to operate her T.V.

2. **To join two independent clauses connected by a transitional word or phrase (or conjunctive adverb) such as *however, moreover, furthermore, therefore, nevertheless, instead, in addition, or consequently.* The transitional word or phrase is preceded by the semicolon and followed by a comma.**

Examples I cut and raked the grass; moreover, I weeded the lawn.

Sally finished typing the paper; however, she forgot to bring it to class.

*Note: Generally, when joining independent clauses with a semicolon, you want to ensure that you are combining sentences that discuss a related topic. Avoid using a semicolon to connect sentences that do not share a common theme or idea.*

3. **To separate items in a series or list when the items themselves contain commas.**

Examples This fall, I will not have to work on Labor Day, September 7; Veteran's Day, November 11; or Thanksgiving Day, November 26.

On our trip, we drove through Des Moines, Iowa;  
Chicago, Illinois; Madison, Wisconsin; and Minneapolis,  
Minnesota.

