

SEMICOLONS AND COLONS

How to use semicolons and colons

THE SEMICOLON:

Use it in place of a period when two independent statements seem to belong together within one sentence:

- The following sentence could be written as two statements, but because they go together smoothly and logically, a semicolon works well in place of a period.
 - Aya is a tireless student; she reviews her lectures every evening without fail.
- It is common to use a connecting word, such as **however**, **therefore**, **meanwhile**, **as a result**, **in addition**, etc. to start the second statement.
 - Spanish is the main language of Central America; however, Belize is an English-speaking country.
 - Nesrine communicates very well in English; moreover, her arguments are well-organized and convincing.



Use it in complex lists where commas are required within the listed items:



- If the following sentence were written with commas only, the reader might be confused about the actual number of animals:
 - The animals at the zoo included the wombat, an Australian marsupial, the lynx, a North American wildcat, and the armadillo, an African anteater.
- To avoid this confusion, the commas that separate the actual items are changed to semicolons, as shown below:
 - The animals at the zoo included the wombat, an Australian marsupial; the lynx, a North American wildcat; and the armadillo, an African anteater.



SEMICOLONS AND FULL COLONS

Continued

THE COLON (OR FULL COLON):

Use it to introduce a quotation:

- The colon comes after an introductory statement when it can stand alone as a full sentence. In effect, it says “and here it is” or “and here they are”.
 - The character makes her feelings clear in this joyous statement: “Life is beautiful!”
- Note that there are several other ways to lead into a quotation. Refer to the English Exit Exam handout: **Referring to a Reading**.

Use it to introduce one or more items in a list in an emphatic, formal way:

- The winter archaeological dig failed for three reasons: poor planning, faulty maps, and bad weather.
- There is one mammal larger than any other creature on earth: the blue whale.
- Parliament could agree on one thing: the time to pass a health care bill was November.

Use it in a number of incidental ways:

- after the salutation in a formal letter
- between hours and minutes in reference to time
- between chapter and verse in reference to the Bible
- between a main title and a subtitle

Dear Sir:

10:25 a.m.

Genesis 1:16

Laos: Land of Contrasts



For more help, contact the Academic Skills Centre (ASC).