



Colons

Colons are punctuation marks that are used for explanation or emphasis, to introduce a series, list, or quotation, and finally to separate elements. Colons have very specific rules and usage requirements.

A. Rules

- I. Do not put a colon between a verb and its object
 - a. Do not write “He went: home” – “He went home” is the correct form
- II. Do not put a colon between a preposition and its object.
 - a. Do not write “He went to: his home” – “He went to his home” is the correct form

B. Colons for Emphasis

- I. Use a colon if (1) you have two independent clauses and one of those clauses either emphasizes or clarifies the other or (2) if you have one independent clause and a dependent clause or phrase. Emphasis can be through an *explanation*, an *example*, or an *appositive*.
 1. *Explanation*: The dog, though eager for affection, had to be treated for various contagious diseases: we had to use gloves to avoid transferring the skin diseases.
 2. *Example*: Over the last decade, teaching tools have changed to various types of digital media: smart rooms now offer Internet access and document cameras.
 3. *Appositive*: The librarian fit the student’s stereotypical idea: an older woman, hair up in a bun, with glasses hanging around her neck by a rhinestone necklace.

C. Colons for Introductions

- I. Introduce quotations with a colon if you are using a block quotation *or* if the signal word or phrase is in a complete sentence form.
 1. Block Quote:
Corbet and Connors (1999) wrote:
In most ads, as in most forms of technical writing, the least prominent of the components is the speaker/writer ... it is usually a corporate person created by the ad agency. (3)
 2. In-text Quote:
The State of The Union address contained one final declaration: “The United States of America is the most powerful nation on Earth. Period.”

D. Colons for Separation

- I. Hours, minutes, and seconds: (4:00 PM)
- II. Salutations in formal letters: (Dear Dr. Smith:)
- III. Ratio: (1:32:14)
- IV. Between the city and the publishers in bibliographical information: (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)
- V. Between titles and subtitles (The Bird Watcher: A Complete Guide)



Semicolons

Semicolons provide readers with a pause between two related independent clauses. Semicolons are only used on three occasions:

- A. **Linking two closely related independent clauses:** When you have a strong or even subtle connection between two independent clauses, you may link those clauses with a semicolon.
 - a. Examples:
 - i. No one heard the policeman's warning; one by one they fell into the hole.
 - ii. We heard the tree limbs snap and fall to the ice covered ground; there was nothing we could do to save our trees.
- B. **Linking two independent clauses joined by a conjunctive adverb or transitional expression:** Common conjunctive adverbs: *moreover*, *therefore*, *however*, and *indeed*. Common transitional phrases: *in addition*, *in fact*, and *for example*.
 - a. Examples:
 - i. I love the long, cold winter months; however, I still look forward to spring.
 1. Note that the semicolon comes **after** the last word of the first independent clause ("I love the long, cold winter months")
 - ii. The small car had much more room than I had imagined; in fact, there was enough room for all five us to comfortably drive to the hotel.
- C. **Separating items in a series when the items in the series contain punctuation such as commas.**
 - a. Examples:
 - i. The doctors said that John could not eat any pork, creamy sauces, or fried foods; that he had to quit smoking, drinking, and taking over the counter pain meds; and finally that John had to exercise, lift weights, and sleep eight hours a night if he wanted to live to see his sixtieth birthday.
 - ii. The commission found that company funds were channeled to special accounts; that the company executives were paying for their extravagant life styles with lavish expense accounts; and that the employees' retirement account had been used to fund personal international trips.