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.