



Using Semicolons and Colons

A **semicolon** indicates a partial stop in a sentence. It takes the place of the comma and conjunction that usually join two independent clauses.

Uses:

- Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses that are related to one another.
- Use a semicolon to separate items in a list that already contain commas.

Examples:

Wrong: While attempting to start the wave at the baseball game; Mary ran into a boy she attended high school with.

Right: Mary decided to start the wave at the baseball game; she stood up on the bleachers and hollered into the crowd.

Wrong: The shopping list contained the following items; milk and cereal for breakfast, sugar, eggs, and oil for Tommy's birthday cake, and ground meat for hamburgers.

Right: I need to buy milk and cereal for breakfast tomorrow; sugar, eggs, and oil for Tommy's birthday cake; and ground meat for supper tonight.

A **colon** indicates a full stop in a sentence and emphasizes the words that follow.

Uses:

- Use a colon before introducing a list. An independent clause must precede the colon. The independent clause can end in *the following* or *as follows*.
- Use a colon to separate two independent clauses when the second independent clause explains the first.

Examples:

Wrong: Because of the rain: the game was canceled, traffic was backed up, and the river flooded.

Right: The teacher insisted students follow these rules in the classroom: listen while others talk, respect your classmates, and finish assignments on time.

Right: My mother baked the following: poppy seed bread, apple pie, and strawberry shortcake.