

Colons [:] and Semi-colons [;]

Colons and semi-colons can add interest to your sentences and can help to express your ideas more clearly. Here are some guidelines for their correct use.



The following are examples of colon use:

To indicate a relationship between two statements, where the second statement expands or illustrates the first:

- The television set, as the icon of the information age, represents the realisation of a dream for human kind: that knowledge and experience can be transmitted and shared across the boundaries of time and space.
- Morgan consistently undermined the study: the outcome was a disaster.
- Buy these things: a packet of peanuts, two loaves of bread, and a kilogram of steak.

To introduce a quotation:

- Peter Coveney made this comment about the nineteenth-century's use of children in fiction: The purpose and strength of...

To indicate a ratio:

- The odds were 20:5 against the team winning.

To separate hours from minutes:

- The train leaves at 8:30 a.m.

The following are examples of semi-colon use:

To emphasise that two complete sentences are closely linked:

- Grammar is easy; I learned it quickly.
- Don't go near the lions; they could bite you. This is an example where a colon could also be used as the second clause expands on the first.

To separate items in a list if the list already includes commas:

- Members of the band include Harold Rostein, clarinetist; Tony Aluppo, tuba player; and Lee Jefferson, trumpeter.
- He has lived in Sydney, Australia; Auckland, New Zealand; and New York, USA.

To separate items in a complex list:

- The recipe required three cups of flour; two cups of milk; a cup of sugar; and six eggs.