

Semicolons

Use semicolons:

1. to join two independent clauses when the clauses are related (Strunk and White, Rule # 5).

Ex: *The days went by slowly; the nights, too, seemed to drag on forever.*

Professor Drew was my mentor at the University of Alabama; he was immensely helpful in learning how to write history papers.

Notes:

a) Do not use a semicolon unless the clauses are related. A period should be used instead.

Ex: 1) *I moved a lot when I was a kid, say between the ages of ten and **twelve**. **In Alabama**, we had a really big home.*

b) Do not overuse a semicolon. Periods are generally preferable.

c) Never use a semicolon to join a dependent clause or a phrase with an independent clause. A comma or possibly a dash should be used instead.

Ex: 1) *While I was getting my stuff together, the telephone rang.*

2) *He looked up and saw her – the woman he had been dreaming about all these years.*

2. to join two independent clauses linked by only a transitional adverb (however, besides, accordingly, therefore, thus, etc.). (S&W #5)

Ex: I can pick up some fruit for you; besides, I need some bread anyway.

Notes:

a) Remember, you should use a comma, not a semicolon, if the clauses are joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet).

3. to replace a comma if the elements of the sentence are extraordinarily long or there are many commas involved already.

Ex: 1) *For food, we had oatmeal, bacon, and nuts; for drinking, we had brought several canteens of water; and for our shelter, we had tents, sleeping bags, and, if necessary, our SUV.*

2) *The movie had many elements I hated: the cinematography, which I found dull and unimaginative; the plot, which just dragged on and on; and, finally, the leading actress, who just would not shut up.*

Colons

Use colons to:

1. to introduce a list. (S&W #7)

Ex: *Three individuals won the local elections: Sue Anne Grimes, Missy Potemkin, and Jerry Highwater. The following cities were hit by heavy rains: Spartanburg, Greenville, and Anderson.*

Notes:

a) ONLY use colons if the list is grammatically separate from the sentence, not if the list is simply the predicate of the sentence.

Ex: *My favorite colors are blue and red* (NOT “My favorite colors are: blue and red.”)

b) Do not use colons if the list is introduced by words like “namely” or “specifically.”

Ex: 1) *She has two unusual features, namely her bright red hair and her green eyes.*

2) *I want two things from the store, specifically a loaf of bread and a pound of peaches.*

2. to introduce a clause or phrase that expands, clarifies, or exemplifies the meaning of the clause before the colon.

Ex: 1) *Memories have one serious limitation: individuals are apt to forget or misremember important events.*

2) *Her entire problem was simple: lack of money.*

3) *One thing remained to be cleaned: the bathroom.*

Notes:

a) In this case, the colon often takes the place of the word “namely.” If you use the word “namely,” though, you should not use the colon, but a comma instead.

Ex: *One thing remained to be cleaned, namely the bathroom.*

You could take out the *namely*, though, and replace it with a colon.

b) There is disagreement about whether an independent clause which follows a colon should be capitalized. I don’t do it personally because I see both clauses as one sentence, that is unless the clause is a question or a quotation. Some grammar books and style guides, however, will tell you to do it.

Ex: *We had only one question: Why would he do such a thing?*

3. to introduce quotations that are grammatically independent (that is, not simply part of the predicate) and that support or contribute to the preceding clause.

Ex: *The immortal words of KISS ran through my mind all night: “I wanna Rock ‘n’ Roll all night and party everyday.”*

Notes:

Do not use a colon if the quotation is simply a predicate of the sentence, even if the quote is long and therefore set off as an indented quote. A comma should be used instead.

1) Ex: *The president said in his newscast,*

I think it is very important to consider all the issues, and to look at the issues from all different sides. And then we need to talk to everyone involved, and think through all the complications. After all, everyone knows this is a crucial problem of universal importance.