

COLONS & SEMICOLONS

This worksheet provides details on the use of two punctuation marks: colons and semicolons.

COLONS

A colon (:) is used to separate independent clauses and introduce a list of items, a quotation, or an explanation. When deciding whether to use a colon, determine if the clause before the colon can stand on its own as a complete sentence. The colon almost always comes after an independent clause. The clause that comes after the colon does not need to be an independent clause.

Emphasize and Explain

A colon is used to separate two independent clauses that are directly related to each other or to place emphasis on the second clause. Additionally, colons can be used to add an explanation to the first clause:

- The kid had one thing on his mind: dessert.
- Diane knows the personalities of all her cats: Mittens is quiet while Snowball is easily angered.

Introduce Lists and Quotations

A colon can be used at the end of a complete sentence to introduce a list/series or quote:

- A classic BLT sandwich is made with simple ingredients: bacon, lettuce, tomato.
- We should live by the Cookie Monster's words of wisdom: "Today me will live in the moment, unless it's unpleasant, in which case me will eat a cookie."

SEMICOLONS

A semicolon (;) is used to connect two independent clauses and to separate items in a complex list.

Join Independent Clauses

A semicolon is used to join two independent clauses that include closely related information. Both clauses should stand on their own as complete sentences before a semicolon is used between them:

- I saw my roommate in the living room; she was crying.
- Dolly Parton is my favorite singer; Beyoncé is a close second.

Separate Complex List Items

Semicolons can be used to help the reader see individual items in complex lists. For example, when listing cities and countries or lists within lists that have commas between them, a semicolon helps with clarity:

- I have family members all over the world, including cousins from Paris, France; an aunt in Tokyo, Japan; a niece in Mexico City, Mexico; and my brother in Marrakech, Morocco.

CONTACT US:

(702) 895-3908 | writingcenter@unlv.edu
unlv.edu/writing-center

