

Semicolons, Colons and Apostrophes

Semicolons:

1. Use a semicolon (;) to join two independent clauses that are closely related.

- *Examples:*
 - In 1800, a traveler needed six weeks to get from New York City to Chicago; in 1860, the trip by railroad took only two days.
 - It is not surprising that our society is increasingly violent; after all, television desensitizes us to violence at a very early age.
 - Most singers gain fame through hard work and dedication; however, Evita found other means.

The clauses before and after the underlined semicolons are all complete sentences that can stand alone. Therefore, they need to be connected with a semicolon, *not a comma!* Replacing one of these semicolons with a comma would result in the dreaded *comma splice*.

2. Use a semicolon between items in a series containing internal punctuation.

- *Example:*
 - Classic science fiction sagas are *Star Trek*, with Mr. Spock; *Battlestar Galactica*, with Cylon Raiders; and *Star Wars*, with Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, and Darth Vader.

Colons:

1. Use a colon after an independent clause to direct attention to a list, an appositive (noun phrases that rename nouns or pronouns), or a quotation.

- *Examples:*
 - The daily routine should include at least the following: twenty knee bends, fifty sit-ups, fifteen leg lifts, and five minutes of running in place. (List)
 - My roommate is guilty of two of the seven deadly sins: gluttony and sloth. (Appositive)
 - Consider the words of John F. Kennedy: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” (Quotation)
- *Incorrect:*
 - Some important vitamins found in vegetables are: vitamin A, thiamine, niacine, and vitamin C.
 - The heart’s two pumps each consist of: an upper chamber, or atrium, and a lower chamber, or ventricle.
 - In each of these cases, the underlined part of the sentence before the colon is not an independent clause - a complete sentence that could stand alone. **Only use colons following independent clauses!**

Apostrophes:

1. To make a singular or plural noun possessive, add -'s.

- *Examples:*
 - the eye of the storm = the storm's eye
 - the coat of the girl = the girl's coat
 - the shirts of the men = the men's shirts
 - the shoes of someone = someone's shoes
 - the promise of Chris = Chris's promise*

*To avoid potentially awkward pronunciation, some writers use only the apostrophe with a singular noun ending in -s. Either is acceptable.

- *Example:* the span of the bridge = the bridges' span

2. To make plural nouns that already end in -s, add only an apostrophe.

- Examples:
 - the rifles of the soldiers = the soldiers' rifles
 - the wings of the birds = the birds' wings