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Semicolons and Colons

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Semicolons and Colons

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Semicolons and colons may look alike, but they have different purposes. Basically, here's a diagram to help you determine which punctuation point to use.

Complete sentence; compete sentence.

Complete sentence: list of items.

Semicolons

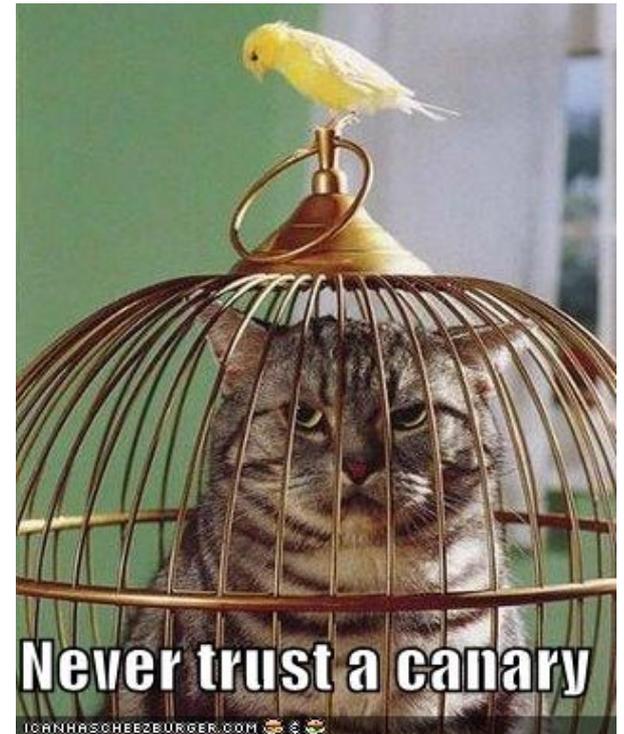


The semicolon has two uses. One use of the semicolon is to join two especially related sentences when there is no coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so = fanboys) between them. Here are some examples:

My canary and my cat always try to outwit each other; I'm not sure who will win this battle.

I love weekends; my main goal is to get caught up on sleep!

Volunteering for charities and non-profit organizations is really important; there are 79 organizations in our town in need of community volunteers.



Semicolons



The second use of the semicolon is to separate a series of items that already include commas within the series. This use of a semicolon allows readers to see the different “pieces” of information as discrete terms. Note: A semicolon is used before the final “and” of this series.

I have lived in **Council Bluffs, Iowa; Dubuque, Iowa; Ames, Iowa; Morris, Minnesota; Groton, Connecticut; Anchorage, Alaska;** and **Champaign, Illinois.**

>>>> Look how difficult this sentence would be to read without those semicolons: **I have lived in Council Bluffs, Iowa, Dubuque, Iowa, Ames, Iowa, Morris, Minnesota, Groton, Connecticut, Anchorage, Alaska, and Champaign, Illinois.**

Here is another example:

I want to download **ABBA’s “Honey, Honey”;** **Johann Sebastian Bach’s “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring”;** **the Beatles’ “Here, There, and Everywhere”;** and **Neil Diamond’s “Cherry, Cherry”** from iTunes.

>>>> Note that in each song title above, there is already a comma. So just sticking in more commas between songs wouldn’t show the separations as clearly. Also note that when you use semicolons to separate terms that are encased by “quotation marks,” the semicolon goes on the outside of the quotation marks (I know it looks strange but that’s the rule).

Colons



Use a colon after a complete sentence to introduce a list, an example, or a quotation. Just remember that you have to have **a complete sentence in front of the colon**. Here are some examples:

A list: Be sure to bring your survival kit to class: the textbook, sharpened pencils, lots of paper, and a bag of Baked Nacho Cheese Doritos for the teacher*.

An example: My diet is based on two major food groups: popcorn* and chocolate*.

Quotation: Author Jen Lancaster reminds us of the following: “There’s almost nothing sweetened apples* and frosty pie crust* can’t make better.”



**I’m beginning to recognize a troubling pattern in all of my examples on this slide...”*

Colons



One common misuse of a colon involves a list but an incomplete sentence to introduce it. Be on the lookout for these “danger” words or phrases:

such as:	including:	as well as:
excluding:	especially:	along with:

These words often introduce lists of items or ideas, but remember you need to have **a complete grammatical sentence** before your list. Note these examples:

Incorrect: A smart winter driver in Illinois will have a lot of safety items in his/her car, **such as:** a cell phone, an emergency kit, flares, food, and bottled water.

Correct: A smart winter driver in Illinois will have a lot of safety items in his/her car, **such as the following:** a cell phone, an emergency kit, flares, food, and bottled water.

Correct: A smart winter driver will include the following items in his/her car: a cell phone, an emergency kit, flares, food, and bottled water.

Incorrect: My favorite types of movies are musicals, **especially:** *Chicago*, *RENT*, *Moulin Rouge*, and *A Chorus Line*.

Correct: My favorite types of movies are musicals, **especially these four:** *Chicago*, *RENT*, *Moulin Rouge*, and *A Chorus Line*.

Do You Still Have Questions?

If you still have questions, please stop by the Writing Lab (DI20)

