

SEMICOLONS AND COLONS

Commas, semicolons, and colons help improve sentence structure and create complex sentences. These sentences can help you more fully elaborate on an idea. These punctuation marks, however, can be difficult to tell apart. The chart below explains the most common occurrences for using commas, semicolons, and colons.

SEMICOLONS

Semicolons can be used in several instances, which are listed below. A general rule of thumb is to use a semicolon when you wish two sentences could be one, but can't.

WHEN TO USE THEM	EXAMPLE
To combine sentences without a conjunction or connecting word	<i>The painting was very pretty; it was destroyed in the war.</i>
To combine sentences with a conjunctive adverb followed by a comma.	<i>The TV show was very popular; <u>however</u>, the critics disapproved.</i> conjunctive adverb
To connect items on a list when each item already has a comma.	<i>We went to <u>Tallahassee, Florida</u>; <u>Cincinnati, Ohio</u>; and <u>Newark, New Jersey</u>.</i>

COLONS

Colons introduce or define something. The primary use of semicolons is to join two main clauses. The difference between semicolons and colons is that colons can combine two independent clauses, but their primary use is to join independent clauses with a list or a noun. Colons are also your only grammatical option when combining a complete sentence with a noun or a list. This is because the two parts would be unequal.

WHEN TO USE THEM	EXAMPLE
After a complete sentence to introduce a list of items when introductory words such as <i>namely</i> , <i>for example</i> , or <i>that is</i> would make the introductory sentences incomplete and replace the colon.	<i>The teacher will require a few things the first day of class: two red pens, a notebook, and a USB drive.</i>
(Instead of a semicolon) between two sentences when the second sentence demonstrates or emphasizes the first sentence and no coordinating conjunction is being used to connect the sentences.	<i>I love going to the movies: action movies are usually my preference.</i>

