WRITING TIP # 7

Colon and Semicolon

The **colon (:)** most often introduces quotations or lists, or is used for emphasis or elaboration.

Rule 1 **USE A COLON TO INTRODUCE A LIST OR QUOTATION.**

The attorney mentioned three possible locations: New York City, San Franciso, and Denver.

The defendant said: "I did not know what was in the package."

Rule 2 **USE A COLON TO SIGNAL THAT MORE ON THE SUBJECT WILL FOLLOW OR TO EMPHASIZE CERTAIN INFORMATION.**

Gibson claimed that his intent was to do only one thing: administer parental discipline.

The **semicolon (;)** is one of the easiest punctuation marks to use for connecting major sentence elements of equal grammatical rank.

Rule 1 **USE A SEMICOLON TO JOIN MAIN CLAUSES INSTEAD OF USING A PERIOD WHEN IDEAS ARE CLOSELY RELATED.**

All of the elements of battery were present (main clause); it was a prima facie (main clause) case.

Rule 2 **USE A SEMICOLON TO JOIN TWO MAIN CLAUSES WHEN USING A CONJUNCTIVE ADVERB BETWEEN THEM.**

The jury decision was inconsistent with the facts; therefore (conjunctive adverb), an appeal is probable.

Rule 3 **USE A SEMICOLON TO SEPARATE COMPONENTS WHEN A LIST ALREADY CONTAINS COMMAS.**

In attendance were the firms of Abel, Baker, and Crony; Gargle, Koff, and Sneaze; and Mountain, Hill, and Valley.

[1] These Writing Tips are adapted in part from Laurel Currie Oates and Ann Enquist, The Legal Writing Handbook (5th ed. 2010); Diana Hacker, The Bedford Handbook (8th ed. 2009); and Gertrude Block, Effective Legal Writing (5th ed. 1999).