

Semicolons and Colons

Semicolons

Semicolons separate two closely related independent clauses that are closely related, which is usually a cause-and-effect relationship.

- I love ice cream; I ate two pints last night.

Also Note that you should use semicolons to separate items in a list when one of those items has commas within it:

- One who commits fraud is subject to criminal liability if one knowingly and willfully falsifies, conceals, or covers up by any trick, scheme, or device a material fact; makes any materially false, fictitious, or fraudulent statement or representation; or makes or uses any false writing or document knowing the same to contain any materially false, fictitious, or fraudulent statement or entry.”

Colons

A colon introduces a specific illustration or illustrations of the generalized topic that precedes it.

I like to think of a colon as the curtain that hides the prize on *The Price is Right*. The host excitedly informs the contestant, “You’ve won a brand-new car!” The curtain then opens to reveal that car, and the announcer gives the specific information about that car, “A 2021 Jeep Grand Cherokee with sun-roof, airbags, optional four- or all-wheel drive, and factory-installed Bose speakers and Bluetooth capabilities.

We might write that exchange as a sentence thusly:

- You’ve won a brand-new car: A 2021 Jeep Grand Cherokee with sun-roof, airbags, optional four- or all-wheel drive, and factory-installed Bose speakers and Bluetooth capabilities.

Colons often introduce lists:

- The following elements constitute robbery: (1) the taking of the property of another (2) from his or her person or in their presence (3) by violence, intimidation or threat (4) with the intent to deprive them of it permanently.

Do make sure that a complete sentence precedes the colon as above. Try to avoid the error below:

- The elements of robbery are: (1) the taking of the property of another (2) from his or her person or in their presence (3) by violence, intimidation or threat (4) with the intent to deprive them of it permanently.

Colons can also introduce quotes, come after a salutation, and separate a title from its subtitle:

- My grandmother would frequently quote Hanlon’s razor: “Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity.”
- Dear Professor Thompson:
- “Rolling Off the Tongue: Structuralist Legal Writing and Keith Richards”

TIPS

- If you have trouble creating a complete sentence prior to your colon try adding “the following” to the end of the clause.
- Capitalize after a colon if it introduces a complete sentence or a proper noun. Do not capitalize if the colon introduces a list.
- Only use one space after a colon.