

Semicolons and Colons

Here's the Idea

A semicolon separates different elements within a sentence.
A colon indicates that an example or explanation follows.

Semicolons

- ▶ **Use semicolons to separate items in a series if any of the items contains commas.**

The divers gathered at dawn; put on their tanks, masks, and wet suits; and jumped off the pier into the ocean.

- ▶ **Use a semicolon between independent clauses joined by a conjunction if either clause contains commas.**

The deep sea once appeared to be cold, murky, and lifeless; but scientists have discovered strange fish living in this region.

- ▶ **Use a semicolon to join the independent clauses of a compound sentence if no coordinating conjunction is used.**

Using a semicolon instead of a comma and a conjunction indicates a stronger relationship between the clauses. Don't use a semicolon unless the ideas in the clauses are closely related.

The storm struck with savage fury, but our house was not damaged at all.

The storm struck with savage fury; it demolished most of the coastal town.

- ▶ **Use a semicolon before a conjunctive adverb or a parenthetical expression that joins the clauses of a compound sentence.**

Use a comma after the adverb or expression.

CONJUNCTIVE ADVERB

The weather was stormy; therefore, we postponed our sailing trip.

PARENTHETICAL EXPRESSION

Storms pose great risks for sailors; in fact, they can be deadly.

For a list of conjunctive adverbs, see p. 27.

Colons

- ▶ **Use a colon to introduce a list of items.**

On a short sailing excursion, you should bring these items: a lifejacket, a pair of sunglasses, and a tube of sunscreen.

Do not use a colon in the following situations: after a verb, in the middle of a prepositional phrase, or after because or as.

After a verb

Incorrect: The three longest rivers in the world <u>are</u> the Nile, the Amazon, and the Yangtze.	Correct: These are the three longest rivers in the world: the Nile, the Amazon, and the Yangtze.
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In the middle of a prepositional phrase

Incorrect: I have swum <u>in</u> the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea.	Correct: I have swum in the following bodies of water: the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea.
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After because or as

Incorrect: The ship was in danger <u>because</u> a terrible storm was approaching.	Correct: The ship was in danger because a terrible storm was approaching.
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Use a colon between two independent clauses when the second clause explains or summarizes the first.

The captain was right: we should have waited out the storm.

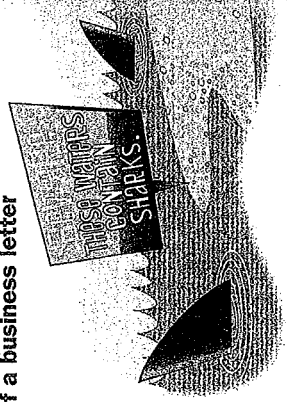
Use a colon to introduce a formal or long quotation.

Winston Churchill inspired the people of England with these words: "We shall not fail or falter; we shall not weaken or tire."

After a colon, capitalize the first word of a formal statement. If the statement is informal, it should begin with a lowercase letter.

Other Uses of Colons Use a colon in the following situations:

- **After the formal salutation of a business letter**
Dear Madam:
- **After labels that signal important ideas**
Beware: These waters contain sharks.
- **Between the hour and minute figures of clock time**
12:15 P.M.



- **Between chapter and verse when referring to certain religious works, such as the Bible, the Qur'an (Koran), and the Talmud**
Psalm 23

2 Practice and Apply

A. CONCEPT CHECK: Semicolon and Colon

Write the word before each missing semicolon or colon in the paragraph below, and insert the appropriate punctuation marks.

Underwater Heat Vents

In 1993 a ship left the shores of Seattle, Washington it headed toward the waters off the coast of Oregon. Geologists had made an interesting discovery a series of seaquakes were occurring on the Juan de Fuca Ridge, an underwater mountain range. Seaquakes occur when areas of the earth's crust shift, collide, and pile up and they are often accompanied by volcanic eruptions. Periodically, sections of the ridge split open, releasing hot lava that heats up the surrounding water.

High ocean temperatures do not usually support life however, some primitive life forms like heat. Scientists aboard the ship were hoping to find at least three forms of life sea-bed microbes, simple plants, and tube worms. All three exist at the bottom of the food chain all three support higher forms of life. The scientists received their reward they found a volcanic chimney growing over a vent. The interior of the chimney reached more than 500 degrees nevertheless, it was crawling with life.

➔ For a SELF-CHECK and more practice, see the EXERCISE BANK, p. 631.

B. REVISING: Correcting Semicolon and Colon Use

Rewrite the following paragraph by adding, deleting, or replacing semicolons and colons. Use capitalization correctly.

Godzilla Spotted Near Seattle!

(1) Godzilla has been spotted near Seattle however, there is no need for panic. (2) This Godzilla is no lizard it is an undersea volcanic chimney. (3) There's a reason why the chimney was named Godzilla it is 15 stories high, almost as tall as the movie monster. (4) Other large chimneys dot the Juan de Fuca Ridge. (5) Three of them are named: Beard, Mongo, and Church. (6) If you want to visit any of these chimneys, you'll need to buy a few items: a submarine; diving gear; and an underwater robot. (7) A team of scientists organized an undersea expedition: to remove a chimney from the sea floor and bring it into a laboratory for study. (8) The team included Cindy Van Dover, a biologist, John R. Delaney, a geologist, and Marv Lilley, a geochemist.