



Punctuation: semicolons (;) and colons (:)

The six rules for using these punctuation marks are provided below.

Semicolons are separation marks indicating a break longer than a comma, but not as long or as final as a full stop. These may take a little practice to get correct so it may be best to avoid them until you understand their use.

1. A semicolon can be used to separate two statements that are complete in themselves, deal with the same topic and are therefore closely linked

- In order to prepare for the function they needed to organise the menus; set up the room; check the lighting; and ensure the sound system was working.
- Almost 2000 years ago the Chinese philosopher, Lao-tzu, is reported to have said, “He is strong who conquers others; he who conquers himself is mighty.”

Colons are special marks used to introduce a list or quotation, to give an explanation in point form, or to indicate the names of people in a script for a play, etc. They are also used in time references.

2. Use a colon to indicate the start of a list, or to separate items in a list

- A good phrase is:
 - accurate
 - original
 - grammatical.

3. A colon can be used in place of a comma to indicate a quotation

- Martin Luther King Jnr once made a famous speech which began: ‘I have a dream.’

4. Use a colon to indicate options (as in multiple –choice questions)

- Place a tick in the box next to the correct answer:
 1. Younger than 20
 2. Between 21-29
 3. Between 30-39
 4. Between 40-50

5. Use a colon to indicate the participants in a dialogue, eg. a transcript of an interview or script for a play

- Mariza: Can you tell me where to find the gallery please?
Wally: Sure! It’s just up these stairs on the left.



6. Use a colon to indicate a time reference

- 10:30 am
- 6:15 pm