



Punctuation: semicolons (;) and colons (:)

Punctuation marks help the reader to clarify meaning and also to establish the tone of the text they are reading. They are therefore important for you to learn how to use correctly in your writing. 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 can be difficult to get correct so may be best avoided if possible.

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

Useful links *(all open in a new window)*

There may be resources that have been created with your lecturers, addressing assignment tasks and topics specific to your courses. Follow the links below to find out:

[Business](#)

[Education, Arts and
Social Sciences](#)

[Health Sciences](#)

[IT, Engineering and the
Environment](#)