

When to Use a Colon:



1. Use a colon to introduce a list of items.

Example:

The job description for a computer technician included the following duties:

- 1) input data,
- 2) create data charts,
- 3) complete reports for Supervisor.

When introductory words (such as *for example*, or *that is*) are used to introduce a list, you don't have to use a colon.

2. Use a colon *after the salutation in a business letter.*

Example: Dear Mr. Walker:

3. Use a colon to separate the parts of a number that indicate time.

Example: 7:30 P.M.

4. Use the colon to separate chapter and verse in a religious book like the Bible or the Qur'an, or the volume and page number of a magazine.

Example: The Gospel of John 3:16

When to use a semi-colon

1. Use a semi-colon (it looks like this >> ;) instead of a period **to separate two related sentences** (or independent clauses).

Example: My mother has a new laptop; I hope she lets me use it for school.

This is a very important rule of English grammar.

Many people make an error by separating two related sentences with a **comma**. [In the example above, it would be **wrong** to write, "My mother has a new laptop, I hope she lets me use it for school."

That error (separating two sentences with a comma) is called a "run-on sentence."

Always be sure to use a semi-colon (or a period) to separate sentences, or a co-ordinating conjunction to join them.

2. Use the semi-colon to separate units of a series, when one or more of the units contain commas.

Example: People at the conference have come from Montreal, Quebec; Halifax, Nova Scotia; and Vancouver, British Columbia.



Key Ideas



Use a colon:

- to introduce a list of items,
- after the salutation in a business letter,
- to separate the parts of a number that indicate time,
- to separate the volume and page number of a magazine, or chapter and verse in a religious book.

Use a semi-colon:

- to separate two related sentences,
- to separate units of a series when some of the items contain commas.





An important guideline (for bright minds):

When listing items in point form or numbered form, the rule is **be consistent with capitalization and punctuation.**

Example: The following items are needed:

- a) warm clothing
- b) sleeping bag
- c) boots
- d) 3 changes of clothes

Notice there is no punctuation after the four items on the list. That is consistent!

Compare the two lists near the top of the previous page: in the main list about when to use a colon, each item is a complete sentence and ends with a period.

In the “key ideas” list, in point form, each item begins with no capital letter, begins with the infinitive form of a verb, and ends with a comma. Then the whole list ends with a period. The whole list is considered one complete sentence.



Practice:

Correct any punctuation errors in the following sentences:

1. I needed only three cards to win; the queen of hearts, the jack of diamonds and the jack of hearts.
2. Mr. Liu held this belief, if he worked hard, he would be able to travel to Africa to take part in a safari.
3. They built a new cottage in Hornby, later they decided to move.
4. If everything goes according to plan he will retire at 40, if real estate prices continue to drop, however, he may have to work until he is 65.
5. You have won the following prizes; a car, a trip to New York, and a computer.

PUNCTUATION

Section 4. Colons and Semi-Colons



Check your answers and the explanations below.

1. I needed only three cards to win: the queen of hearts, the jack of diamonds and the jack of hearts.
1 mark: Use a colon to begin a list, not a semi-colon.
2. Mr. Liu held this belief: if he worked hard, he would be able to travel to Africa and to take part in a safari.
1 mark: The sentence is a “run-on sentence” because it contains two complete sentences separated by a comma.
If you insert a colon, you are correctly introducing the sentence that follows.
3. They built a new cottage in Hornby; later, they decided to move.
1 mark: The sentence in the practice exercise is a “run-on sentence” because it contains two complete thoughts separated by a comma.
If you use a semi-colon to separate the two independent clauses, the sentence is correct. [If you insert the co-ordinating conjunction “but” before the word “later,” the sentence would be correct with only a comma after “Hornby.”]
4. If everything goes according to plan, he will retire at 40; if real estate prices continue to drop, however, he may have to work until he is 65.
1 mark: The sentence in the practice exercise is a “run-on sentence” because it contains two complete thoughts separated by a comma.
If you use a semi-colon to separate the two independent clauses, the sentence is correct.
5. You have won the following prizes: a car, a trip to New York and a computer.
1 mark: Use a colon to begin a list, not a semi-colon.

How did you do? ____ / 5

Record your achievement on your chart.

If you need more information about colons and semi-colons, explore <http://www.arts.uottawa.ca/writcent/hypergrammar/semicolon.html> and <http://www.arts.uottawa.ca/writcent/hypergrammar/colon.html>

