

Colons and Semicolons as Linking Punctuation

Part I

One of the important functions of the colon (:) and semicolon (;) is to link or connect sentences and word groups. They serve as conjunctions and indicate how the emphasis is distributed. This worksheet covers some of the most common uses of colons and semi-colons.

Colon The colon (:) indicates the emphasis is to be on what follows it. The colon acts as a sign --> saying, "Look out, here it comes."

Model

General Statement --> specification, amplification, explanation.

Example: He had one goal: to pass the course.

Circle the letter of the sentence using the colon as symbolized in the model.

1. A. The following students are to report to the Dean's office:
Jones, Murphy, Jackson, and Weidner.
- B. The following students are to report to the Dean's office:
I don't know why, but it must be important.
2. A. Here is a famous saying by Mark Twain: "Man is the only animal that
blushes, or needs to."
- B. Here is a famous saying by Mark Twain: when you read it, you will
recognize it immediately.
3. A. There is only one thing I expect from my dog: complete obedience.
- B. There is only one thing I expect from my dog: and it is not really too
much to ask.
4. A. It was just as she suspected: her fears were now confirmed.
- B. It was just as she suspected: he lost all his money at poker.

Indicate by Yes or No if the following sentences could be connected, perhaps with a little revision, by a colon.

- _____ 1. Frank had several admirable qualities. He was handsome, intelligent, and his father owned a liquor store.
- _____ 2. Will stayed up all night cramming for the exam. Nevertheless, he failed it.
- _____ 3. Shannon's husband always packed the same things in her lunch box. For lunch Shannon always had a salami sandwich, a banana, and coffee.
- _____ 4. Kelly's putting on the final day was erratic. Consequently, Kelly lost the golf tournament.

The element following the colon can be a sentence, a phrase, a single word, a quotation; but the element preceding the colon must be a complete sentence.

His fishing equipment included the following items:
a rod, a reel, a can of worms, and a six-pack.

Circle the letter of the sentence which is grammatically correct.

- 1. A. The critics considered the book to be: trivial, boring, and smutty.
B. The critics characterized the book this way: trivial, boring, and smutty.
- 2. A. These were the movies nominated for the 1994 Movie-of-the-year Award: The Piano, Jurassic Park, and Schindler's List.
B. The movies nominated for the 1994 Movie-of-the-Year Award are: The Piano, Jurassic Park, and Schindler's List.
- 3. A. He became a Writing Lab tutor because: he loved grammar and the pay was generous.
B. He became a Writing Lab tutor because of two considerations: he loved grammar and the pay was generous.

Write a sentence including the given items and using a colon.

Example:

Jon and Mary visited Ann Arbor for just one reason.
Jon and Mary wanted to go to the Art Fair.

Jon and Mary visited Ann Arbor for just one reason: to go to the Art Fair.

1. Tommy wrote to Santa Claus.
He wanted a sled, an air rifle, and a catcher's mitt.

2. A brilliant characterization of Eleanor Roosevelt by Adlai Stevenson.
"She would rather light candles than curse the darkness."

3. Finalists in the horse show.
Misty, Blaze, Pepper.

4. Jermaine wanted the red convertible.
He had but one thought in mind.

Part II

Semicolon

The semicolon (;) indicates that the emphasis is distributed between two (or more) sentences. It acts as a sign <--> saying, "these ideas are balanced or parallel, or comprise a unit of thought."

Model

equality, ideas closely connected SENTENCE # 1 <---> SENTENCE # 2
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Often the "equal" relationship between the sentences is indicated by a signal word.

Examples:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| Addition | The police officer was respected by the citizens; <u>moreover</u> even her fellow officers thought highly of her. |
| Contrast | Jones is the fastest back in the league; <u>however</u> he is unable to fake out the secondary on a pass pattern. |
| Cause and Effect | The computer had a virus; <u>consequently</u> , all the files were lost. |

NOTE: In distributing the emphasis the semicolon may be accompanied by a transitional word, by no transitional word, or - as in this passage - by a coordinating conjunction; but the important thing to recognize is that the function of the semicolon is to indicate a unit of thought which is smaller than the paragraph and larger than a single sentence. In such instances, it would not be "incorrect" to use a period because the author indicates with a semi-colon that there is a closer relationship between the two sentences than when a period is used to separate them.

All the following sentences are punctuated with a colon. In each pair, circle the one which should be punctuated with a semicolon.

1. A. The team was consistent in its weak serving and poor spiking; consequently, it was firmly entrenched in last place.

- B. The manager knew the reason attendance had fallen off: his team was firmly entrenched in last place.
2. A. I know why you will like my cousins: they are rich.
B. You will like my cousins: they are rich.
3. A. Ashley stayed up all night studying for the exam: nevertheless, she failed miserably.
B. It's not difficult to understand why Jane failed the exam: she stayed up all night studying.
4. A. Girls are made of sugar and spice: boys are made of snails and puppy dogs' tails.
B. There is an old saying that goes something like this: girls are made of sugar and spice, but little boys are made of snails and puppy dogs' tails.

Grab a handful of colons and semicolons and distribute them correctly in the following sentences.

Example:

Steve and Katie went to Florida for three reasons: they wanted to have fun; they wanted to lay on the beach; they wanted to get away from their parents.

1. First the salesperson rang the doorbell _ then he banged on the front windows.
2. "Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you _ reprove a wise man, and he will love you." --Proverbs.
3. He knew a way to have the world beat a path to his door _ build a better mousetrap.
4. A colon gives the following sign to the reader _ "Look ahead, here it comes.
5. Often a writer will wish to indicate to his/her reader that the thoughts in several sentences are closely related _ consequently, he/she will use semicolons rather than periods.