Semicolons

Semicolons can be very confusing, and many writers avoid them altogether. But used correctly, semicolons can add style and grace to your writing.

1. Most of the time, a semicolon marks a pause in a sentence that is stronger than a comma but weaker than a period. The two sentences need to be closely related in thought.
   • Mark is an excellent playwright; he wrote UT’s most popular play last year.
2. Semicolons can separate items of equal grammatical weight.
   • Independent clause; independent clause.
   • Meryl Streep is one of the best actresses of our time; she has been nominated for thirteen Academy awards and twenty Golden Globes.
   • Phrase; phrase (when phrases contain internal commas)
     • Johnny Depp’s memorable film roles include Edward Scissorhands, the tortured-soul science experiment gone awry; Willy Wonka, the infamous chocolate factory owner and protector of the oompah-loompahs; and Captain Jack Sparrow, the only pirate known to wear eyeliner on a regular basis.
   • Item in a list; item in a list; item in a list (when items contain internal commas)
     • Cassandra loves reading histories about European royalty, like Mary, Queen of Scots; Diana, Princess of Wales; and Archduke Rudolf, Prince of Austria-Hungary.
3. Use semicolons between independent clauses joined by words and phrases such as however, therefore, nonetheless, moreover, consequently, indeed, in fact, at any rate, for example, and on the other hand. These words cannot connect sentences by themselves; therefore, they require a semicolon before them and a comma after them.
   • Stephen is the valedictorian of Messer High School; moreover, he is class president and runs varsity track.
   • UT Austin is an excellent school; in fact, a USA Today study shows that UT tied with the University of Chicago as the number one source of Fortune 1000 CEOs hired in 2004-2005.
Colons

Colons have very specific uses. Like semicolons, colons can brighten your writing if used correctly.

1. Colons can direct readers to examples, explanations, or significant words and phrases. Colons used in this way normally follow complete sentences.
   • Jane Austen’s best novel is also her most famous: *Pride and Prejudice* has been adapted to film ten times and has never gone out of print.

2. Colons can direct readers to lists.
   • The union listed their grievances: long working hours, low pay, dangerous working conditions, too little time for meals, and poor management.

3. Colons can direct readers to quotations or dialogue.
   • James Bond’s request was very clear: “A martini. Shaken, not stirred.”

4. Colons can join two complete sentences when the second illustrates or explains the first.
   • The Facebook will prove invaluable in the future: it has provided a way for us to remain in contact with people we would have otherwise never spoken to again.

5. A good rule of thumb: you can use a colon to replace the phrases namely or that is.
   • The Harry Potter novels are among the best-selling books of all time: [that is] they have sold over 300 million copies worldwide.
   • Dan Brown’s book *The Da Vinci Code* is so popular because it raises many points of controversy: [namely] the accuracy of stories in the Bible, the role of the Vatican in world history, and the divinity of Jesus.

Source: