Semicolons and Colons

Semicolons

Use semicolons in the following situations:

1) To join two closely related independent thoughts into the same sentence

   Example: Fred once again suspected the wrong person; he thought Red Herring had robbed the bank.

   *If you include a transitional word after the semicolon, a comma should follow that transitional word.

   Example: I spilled coffee on my shirt and had to change it; therefore, I arrived late to work.

2) To separate items in a long list that already contains commas

   Example: Dina’s favorite actors are Hugh Dancy, who stars in *Hannibal*; Mark Harmon, who stars in *NCIS*; and Jensen Ackles, who stars in *Supernatural*.

Colons

Include colons *after a complete sentence* in the following situations:

1) To introduce a list

   Example: Gustavo has three roommates: Jillian, Tyrone, and Rupert.

2) To introduce a quotation

   Example: In a famous speech, Martin Luther King, Jr., expressed the following sentiment: “I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

3) To introduce an explanation

   Example: I can draw only one conclusion: Becky has decided to move to Tucson.