Semicolons and Colons

Semicolons

Use semicolons in the following situations:

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.

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:

To introduce a list

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

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.”

To introduce an explanation

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