



# WRITING CENTRE

## THE SEMI-COLON

Semi-colons are used to separate items in a list and to link closely related sentences. They represent a break in a sentence that is greater than a comma but less than a full stop.

### TO SEPARATE ITEMS IN A LIST

The semi-colon is used to separate items in a list when one or more items contain a comma.

The four arenas will be: Old Trafford, Manchester; Anfield, Liverpool; Elland Road, Leeds; and the Emirates Stadium, Holloway.

### TO LINK SENTENCES WHICH ARE CLOSELY RELATED

Closely related sentences are often linked to emphasise their relationship.

*I read the instructions carefully. They were difficult to understand.*

One way to link these sentences would be to use a comma and coordinating conjunction (and, or, but, nor, for, so, yet).

*I read the instructions carefully, but they were difficult to understand.*

The semi-colon could also be used to link these sentences.

*I read the instructions carefully; they were difficult to understand.*

The semicolon tells the reader that the second clause is closely linked to the first clause. Sentences joined in this way should be similar in either theme or grammatical structure.

*Roses are red; violets are blue.*

*He was nervous about giving the speech; he asked for water several times.*

*The deadline has come forward a week; the lawyer's help will be needed.*

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## FOR USE WITH OTHERWISE, HOWEVER, THEREFORE...

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The semi-colon can be used to link sentences which contain conjunctive adverbs such as otherwise, however; therefore, moreover; nevertheless, thus, besides, accordingly, consequently, instead, and hence.

I did not read the book; instead, I watched the film.

(Notice that the connecting word instead is followed by a comma.)

The research is far from conclusive; nevertheless, it has some value in this case.

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## COLON

The colon acts as a pause which introduces related information. It indicates that the reader should look forward to information that follows on from the earlier statement.

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## TO INTRODUCE A LIST

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The colon can be used to introduce the items in a list.

*Topics discussed will include: grammar, punctuation and essay structure.*

*All members of the society undertake to: swear an oath of secrecy, pay their monthly dues and attend all monthly meetings.*

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## TO INTRODUCE AN EXPLANATION, CONCLUSION OR AMPLIFICATION

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The colon can also be used to introduce an explanation, conclusion or amplification of an earlier statement. The use of the colon separates and highlights the second statement, showing that it follows on from the first.

*Becoming a doctor requires more than intelligence: it requires great dedication.*

*After thoughtful consideration, he made his decision: he would sell his house and move to South Africa.*

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## Conclusion

The semi-colon and colon are often underused, yet their correct use can enhance the clarity of your writing. They are useful tools that allow you to avoid overuse of the comma and full stop.

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