Semi-Colons & Colons

Only use semi-colons and colons when you know exactly why you are using them.

Semi-colon
Connects two closely related, complete sentences.
  • Michael brought a shredder to work that day; he would not tolerate any more improper semi-colons.

Separates listed items if the items themselves use commas.
  • Bridget compiled a list of the offenders, which included Alexa, a freshman; Cody, a junior; and Erika, a senior.

Colon
Introduces a list at the end of a complete sentence.
  • In frustration, Harumy began to destroy the Writing Center: the chairs, the tables, and the beautifully painted walls.

Introduces a quotation after a complete sentence.
  • Rosario and Xinjie began to scream: “Cease this destruction at once!”

Introduces an answer (or an appositive).
  • Only one person could save the Writing Center now: Dr. Katherine Schmidt.

Introduces a complete sentence that modifies a prior sentence.
  • Madalyn had a superpower: it was time control.

Follows a salutation in a formal letter.
  • Dear Editors of the Oregonian:

Separates the hour and the minute in a written time construction.
  • 11:47

Separates the chapter and verse in Biblical citations.
  • Proverbs 3:5

Separates titles and subtitles.
  • Woe is I: The Grammaphobe’s Guide to Better English in Plain English

Comma Splices
A comma splice is a common error occurring when a comma is used between two complete, often related, sentences. A semi-colon can fix this problem.

I don’t like being sick during September; it is hard to catch up on schoolwork so early in the year.

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WOU Writing Center
Resource Library

December 27, 2017 (SRT)