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.

- Rosario brought decorations to work that day; she wanted the Writing Center to look festive.

Separates listed items if the items themselves use commas.

- Daniel compiled a list of his favorite cities, which included Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; and San Francisco, California.

Colon

Introduces a list at the end of a complete sentence.

- Morgan took inventory of the decorations: snowflakes, trees, and bells.

Introduces a quotation after a complete sentence.

- Katherine began to explain: “We like to change the decorations every holiday.”

Introduces an answer (or an appositive).

- One person volunteered to bring food for everyone: Maddie.

Introduces a complete sentence that modifies a prior sentence.

- Sarah had a superpower: it was time control.

Follows a salutation in a formal letter.

- Dear Editors of the Oregonian:

Separates titles and subtitles.

- Woe is I: The Grammarphobe’s Guide to Better English in Plain English

Separates the hour and the minute in a written time construction.

- 11:47

Separates the chapter and verse in Biblical citations.

- Proverbs 3:5