

Full Colons

Full colons can be used to introduce lists.

e.g. Crows eat a variety of natural and man-made foods: insects, amphibians, seafood, wheat, fruit, rodents, seeds, and so on.

They can also be used to introduce an explanation or result.

e.g. Most analysts agree on the main cause for the economic crisis: de-regulation.
e.g. The defendant had a good reason for not attending the hearing: he was in another country.

Full colons can also introduce very long quotes, or quotes that are themselves complete sentences.

e.g. Martin Forsch had this to say about the proposed bylaw: "It didn't work in Winnipeg, and it won't work here."

e.g. Romeo experiences a premonition of his dark fate in Act 1, Scene 4:

. . . my mind misgives
Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels and expire the term
Of a despised life

In all of these cases, there must be a complete sentence before the colon. Alternatively, a phrase like "in this way," "as follows," or "the following" may appear before the colon.

e.g. Each camper should bring the following: waterproof matches, a tarp, a canteen, a water purifier, and a Swiss army knife.

Semi-Colons

Semi-colons can be used to join two complete sentences together. However, we only use semi-colons for this purpose when the two sentences are closely related in meaning.

e.g. The wheat crops failed; the livestock starved.

Semi-colons are also used instead of commas to separate items in a list that already contain commas.

e.g. The following people attended the meeting: Chris Woodsman, head of the Woodlot Owners Association; Mark Mallard, president of Ducks Unlimited; and Susan Countsalot, director of the Chartered Accountants Association.