1. Semicolons

Semicolons (;) can be a tricky part of any writer’s process; however, they can be extremely useful as well! It is a handy piece of punctuation that calls for a pause in reading without coming to a complete stop.

**Semicolons can be used to break up two independent clauses that directly relate to each other.**

Example:

- I love watching Christmas movies; *Christmas Vacation* is my overall favorite. (Correct)

Example:

- I love watching Christmas movies; Thor is my favorite avenger. (Incorrect)

The first example has two independent clauses that directly relate to each other making the use of a semicolon correct. The second example has two independent clauses, yet they do not relate to each other in any easily understood way. This makes the use of a semicolon incorrect.

**Semicolons can be used with a conjunctive adverb to link together independent clauses. (This is especially useful when it is not immediately clear how the independent clauses relate to each other.)**

Example:

- John needs to write his first essay for his history class; therefore, he went to the library.

John writing his essay and needing to go to the library do not directly relate to each other, so the *therefore* makes it clear that John is going to the library because of his essay paper. There are quite a few conjunctive adverbs, but here is a list of the most popular: *therefore, nonetheless, however, furthermore, and moreover.*

**Semicolons can be used when separating lists that are already full of commas in order to make the list clearer.**

Example *without semicolons:*

- My favorite professors are Dr. Chef, who teaches history, Prof. Mustard, who teaches geology, and Dr. Slow, who teaches math. (Confusing)
Example *with semicolons*:

- My favorite professors are Dr. Chef, who teaches history; Prof. Mustard, who teaches geology; and Dr. Slow, who teaches math. (Clear)

The use of the semicolon adds better distinction between the different elements in the list.

### 2. **COLONS:**

Colons (:) are used to introduce lists, explanations, examples, or quotations.

**Colons can be used to introduce lists but not when following a verb.**

Example:

- Janice needs to pack three things for the trip: sunglasses, pizza, and sunscreen. (Correct)

Example:

- The things that Janice needs to pack for the trip are: sunglasses, pizza, and sunscreen. (Incorrect)

The first example is correct since *trip* is a noun, which makes the use of a colon right. The second example is incorrect because *are* is a verb, which makes the use of a colon wrong.

**Colons can be used to connect two related independent clauses.**

Example:

- Megan had to buy sherbet: it was essential to the punch.

The second clause is clarifying why Megan had to buy punch, which makes the two independent clauses relate to one another.

**Colons can be used to introduce a direct quote.**

- Peter shouted to his friends: “Only buy pizza if you are going to share it!”

### 3. **DASHES**—

Dashes (---), not to be confused with hyphens (-), can be used to break up parts of a sentence and add emphasis to wherever they are used in a sentence.

**Dashes can be used to add emphasis to the end of a sentence.**

Example:
• There was one woman who stood out from her peers—Mary Jane.
This creates a dramatic pause before the name. (This is often discouraged in academic writing; a colon is used instead.)
• There was one woman who stood out from her peers: Mary Jane.

**Dashes can be used to set off the beginning of a sentence.**

Example:
• Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Wolfman—these are the classic icons of horror stories.

**Dashes can be used to set off extra content that adds to but is not necessary to a sentence.**

Example:
• The many varieties of pie—blueberry, pumpkin, and apple—make it my favorite dessert.

The above sentence would be complete without the information within the dashes. However, the information within the dashes adds something useful to the sentence.