Using Colons and Semicolons

When should they be used?

# Explanation

Colons and semicolons are two commonly misunderstood forms of punctuation.1

Colons are commonly used to introduce a list items; they can also show that an idea will be further explained, clarified, or restated. Semicolons connect ideas that are closely related and provide a longer pause in a sentence. They can also help to add transition between ideas and/or help avoid confusion with comma overuse. Colons and semicolons should be used with caution. Overuse of them can lead to unnecessarily long sentences.

# Examples

*Colon used to introduce a list*

This year I want to visit four cities: Honolulu, Madrid, New York, and Barcelona.

*Colon used to further explain an idea or thought*

The CEO’s remark at the meeting was very insightful: “No one wins if our customers do not win.”

*Semicolon used to connect related items*

The new rule has been approved; only three people voted against it.

*Semicolon used to avoid comma confusion*

This is her first job; but she seems to have strong communication skills, to be motivated, and to like her co-workers.

# Exercises

*Where should colons or semicolons be placed in the following sentences?*

* There are three essential items for dogs food, water, and shelter.
* The employees arrived two minutes late to the meeting they seemed embarrassed.
* The new building will be complete next month however, we will wait until the interior is painted before moving in.

1Steiner-Williams, Judy. *Colons and semicolons*. LinkedIn Learning, linkedin.com/learning/advanced-grammar/colons-and-semicolons?u=41910780.