

COLONS AND SEMICOLONS

The **colon** follows an independent clause (a complete statement) and introduces one of three things: a defining example, a list, or a quotation.

- She had only one person to blame: herself.
- A new menace threatens Eastern Canada: pollution.
- To be physically healthy we need three things: ample rest, a good diet, and plenty of exercise.
- The title of one of his poems signifies Dylan Thomas’s feelings about his father’s death: “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night.”

Semicolons can be used between closely-related independent clauses; they are also used, instead of commas, to separate items in lengthy, complex lists.

- I am hoping to see The Titanic before it leaves town; I am told that the three hours it takes to watch this movie pass very quickly.
- Writing Centre tutors assist students in getting their ideas on paper and in creating outlines, which are prewriting activities; they help students to determine whether their drafts are logically-organized, which is a revision activity; and they encourage students to identify grammatical and spelling errors in their writing, which is an editing activity.

A special note: Sometimes transition words are used between independent clauses to show cause and effect or the continuation of ideas. Words and phrases used this way are preceded by semicolons and followed by commas, as follows:

- We greatly appreciate your excellent on-the-job performance; therefore, we are giving you a raise.
- Computers have replaced the postal system as the “medium of choice” for correspondence; for example, e-mail is far more frequently used than letters of request for obtaining information.

Here is a list of some words and phrases that require semicolons and commas when used in such constructions:

consequently	besides
furthermore	however
for example	in fact
therefore	nevertheless
thus	moreover

Please add or delete colons and semicolons, as necessary. If a sentence needs no corrections, mark it with a “C.”

1. Occupations I have considered include: nursing, teaching, singing, and writing.
2. He loves “The Irish Descendents,” he goes to all of their concerts.
3. Although we had planned to travel to New York; we finally decided that we could not afford the trip.
4. She decided to prepare her most impressive meal; seafood steamed in wine.
5. He began eating a litre of ice cream every night; consequently, he now has high cholesterol.
6. The cat spent three days following the child, eagerly, to and from the school bus, he then began planting himself outside the back door and howling, dismally, for food and comfort, and finally, he developed the habit of whisking into the house every time someone opened the door.
7. John F. Kennedy’s most famous words are probably: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”
8. Homemade salad requires several basic ingredients, salt and pepper, fresh or dried herbs such as parsley, dill, thyme, oregano, and basil, which are readily available at most supermarkets, vinegar or citrus fruit, depending on your preference, and a good-quality oil.

9. Answer Key - Colons and Semicolons Exercise

1. Occupations I have considered include nursing, teaching, singing, and writing.
2. He loves “The Irish Descendents”; he goes to all of their concerts.
OR
He loves “The Irish Descendents,” and he goes to all of their concerts.
OR
He loves “The Irish Descendents.” He goes to all of their concerts.
OR
Since he loves “The Irish Descendents,” he goes to all of their concerts.
3. Although we had planned to travel to New York, we finally decided that we could not afford the trip.
4. She decided to prepare her most impressive meal: seafood steamed in wine.
5. He began eating a litre of ice cream every night; consequently, he now has high cholesterol. **C**
6. The cat spent three days following the child, eagerly, to and from the school bus; he then began planting himself outside the back door and howling, dismally, for food and comfort; and finally, he developed the habit of whisking into the house every time someone opened the door.
7. John F. Kennedy’s most famous words are probably “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”
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