❶ Here's the Idea

A semicolon separates different elements within a sentence.
A colon indicates that an example or explanation follows.

Semicolons

▶ **Use semicolons to separate items in a series if any of the items contains commas.**

> The divers gathered at dawn; put on their tanks, masks, and wet suits; and jumped off the pier into the ocean.

▶ **Use a semicolon between independent clauses joined by a conjunction if either clause contains commas.**

> The deep sea once appeared to be cold, murky, and lifeless; but scientists have discovered strange fish living in this region.

▶ **Use a semicolon to join the independent clauses of a compound sentence if no coordinating conjunction is used.**

Using a semicolon instead of a comma and a conjunction indicates a stronger relationship between the clauses. Don't use a semicolon unless the ideas in the clauses are closely related.

> The storm struck with savage fury, but our house was not damaged at all.

> The storm struck with savage fury; it demolished most of the coastal town.

▶ **Use a semicolon before a conjunctive adverb or a parenthetical expression that joins the clauses of a compound sentence.**

Use a comma after the adverb or expression.

CONJUNCTIVE ADVERB
> The weather was stormy; therefore, we postponed our sailing trip.

PARENTHETICAL EXPRESSION
> Storms pose great risks for sailors; in fact, they can be deadly.

For a list of conjunctive adverbs, see p. 27.

Colons

▶ **Use a colon to introduce a list of items.**

> On a short sailing excursion, you should bring these items: a lifejacket, a pair of sunglasses, and a tube of sunscreen.

Do not use a colon in the following situations: after a verb, in the middle of a prepositional phrase, or after *because* or *as.*

After a verb

Incorrect: The three longest rivers in the world **are:** the Nile, the Amazon, and the Yangtze.	**Correct:** These are the three longest rivers in the world: the Nile, the Amazon, and the Yangtze.

In the middle of a prepositional phrase

Incorrect: I have swum **in:** the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea.	**Correct:** I have swum in the following bodies of water: the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea.

After *because* or *as*

Incorrect: The ship was in danger **because:** a terrible storm was approaching.	**Correct:** The ship was in danger because a terrible storm was approaching.

▶ **Use a colon between two independent clauses when the second clause explains or summarizes the first.**

The captain was right: we should have waited out the storm.

▶ **Use a colon to introduce a formal or long quotation.**

Winston Churchill inspired the people of England with these words: "We shall not fail or falter; we shall not weaken or tire."

After a colon, capitalize the first word of a formal statement. If the statement is informal, it should begin with a lowercase letter.

Other Uses of Colons Use a colon in the following situations:

- **After the formal salutation of a business letter**
  Dear Madam:
- **After labels that signal important ideas**
  Beware: These waters contain sharks.
- **Between the hour and minute figures of clock time**
  12:15 P.M.
- **Between chapter and verse when referring to certain religious works, such as the Bible, the Qur'an (Koran), and the Talmud**
  Psalm 23: