

Semicolon and Colon Handout

Remember that an *independent clause* is “a clause that can stand alone as a sentence, containing a subject and a predicate with a finite verb.” An *independent clause* communicates a complete thought.

Common and Proper Uses of the Semicolon:

- Use a semicolon to connect two *independent clauses* that are related to one another.
 - Example: We were on the moon; there wasn’t much time to celebrate.

Common and Proper Uses of the Colon:

- Use a colon when introducing a quotation after an independent clause. The quotation must also be an independent clause.
 - Example: Once I jumped off, I managed to speak the line I’d rehearsed in my head all those times: “That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.”
- Use a colon when introducing a list.
 - Example: For the trip we needed different kinds of equipment: life support packs, helmets, and layers of special clothing under our space suits.
- Use a colon between two independent clauses when the second clause provides more detail about or emphasizes the first clause.
 - Example: We didn’t have time to celebrate, because we had a mission to accomplish: we had to collect and report on samples of the moon’s surface.

Further reference: The Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL): <http://owl.english.purdue.edu> (search terms: semicolons and colons).