SEMICOLONS, COLONS, DASHES, AND PARENTHESES

Semicolons

Use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses. No conjunction is needed.

Martin spent five hours cooking dinner; his date was impressed.

Use a semicolon to separate items in a series when the items include commas.

Before you graduate, you need to take classes from Mr. Neely, the art teacher; Mrs. Roland, the chemistry teacher; and Mrs. Chavez, the history teacher.

Colons

Use a colon to introduce a list *only* after a complete sentence.

When you enroll in a cooking class, you must remember to purchase a variety of items: wooden spoons, metal bowls, a spatula, and a whisk.

No colon   When you enroll in a cooking class, you must remember to purchase wooden spoons, metal bowls, a spatula, and a whisk.

Use a colon to introduce a quote *only* after a complete sentence.

Hamlet contemplates his own mortality: "What is a man, / If his chief good and market of his time / Be but to sleep and feed" (4.4.33-5).

No colon   Hamlet contemplates his own mortality when he asks, "What is a man, / If his chief good and market of his time / Be but to sleep and feed" (4.4.33-5).

Dashes and Parentheses

Dashes and parentheses create breaks in sentences to signal an interruption in thought or a parenthetical expression that may be confused if you use a comma. Because they create breaks in writing, dashes and parentheses can make your writing choppy; *limit your use of them*. Dashes and parentheses can be used interchangeably; however, parentheses make sharper breaks than dashes.

Her three children—Mary, Sarah, and Ruth—are named after biblical figures.

The college (established in 1904) hired twelve new faculty members to teach developmental courses.