

## SEMICOLONS AND COLONS

- **PUT A SEMICOLON BETWEEN CLOSELY RELATED INDEPENDENT CLAUSES**

Semicolons are stronger than commas but weaker than periods. They indicate that two sentences are grammatically independent but that their ideas go together. If you are uncomfortable with semicolons, you can always connect two independent clauses with a comma and a “fanboy” (a coordinating conjunction: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet*) or with a subordinating conjunction (no comma in this case). The choice between the different sentence patterns is stylistic rather than grammatical.

*Injustice is relatively easy to bear; what stings is justice. (H.L. Mencken)*

*Injustice is relatively easy to bear, but what stings is justice.*

*Don't talk about yourself; it will be done when you leave. (Wilson Mizner)*

*Don't talk about yourself because it will be done when you leave.*

Semicolons are generally used for **lists of sentences**. Although some grammar handbooks agree that short sentences that all follow the same grammatical pattern (*I came, I saw, I conquered*) can be separated by commas, it is safer to use semicolons:

*Francis Wayland Thurston was appalled at the statue he found: it was a dragon; it was an octopus; it was a monster.*

- **PUT A COLON AFTER A COMPLETE SENTENCE AND BEFORE A QUOTATION, AN EXPLANATION, OR A LIST**

Just like a semicolon, a colon always follows a complete sentence. What comes after the colon, however, can be a complete sentence or not, depending on circumstances. Colons are followed by a quotation (generally a complete sentence), an explanation (complete sentence or not), or a list (generally words or phrases, but there can be a series of sentences as well).

*Henry Anthony Wilcox based his art on his dreams: there were “great Cyclopean cities of titan blocks and sky-flung monoliths, all dripping with green ooze and sinister with latent horror.” (quotation)*

*Wilcox's dream was accompanied by the persistence of two words: Cthulhu and R'yeh. (explanation)*

*Miskatonic University includes the following schools: Miskatonic College, Arkham Medical College, and Pickman Art Institute. (list)*

► Did you like the sample sentences? You can get more in H.P. Lovecraft's “The Cthulu Mythos” series of stories (specifically “The Call of Cthulhu,” “The Horror in the Clay,” and “The Madness from the Sea.”)