

PUNCTUATE THIS: THE SEMICOLON, COLON, AND DASH

A Guide by Camille M. Burger, Student, Tutor, and Grammar-Lover

THE SEMICOLON

1. ; ← This is what it looks like.

2. USES

a. Separate two independent clauses in a compound sentence.

- i. Life moves pretty fast; if you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.¹



b. Separate items in a list when one item contains other punctuation within itself.



- i. Please promise me that you will never wear white after Labor Day; drop out of school, become a bum, and ride the rails through central Asia; or use semicolons incorrectly.

c. Make a winking face in a text message.

- i. Once you know how to use semicolons properly, you'll never look at your texts the same way again ;)



¹ *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, Matthew Broderick

² http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/files/2010/03/ferris_bueller.jpg

THE COLON

1. : ← This is what it looks like.

2. USES

a. Separate two independent clauses that fit a special relationship.

i. The second clause offers further explanation of the first.



1. The modern college student is adept at coming up with excuses for missing class: "I was sick;" "The weather was bad;" and "My bat signal went off and I had to save Gotham City," are all commonly heard by professors.

ii. The second clause is related to or continues the first.

1. You've gotta ask yourself one question: "Do I feel lucky?"¹

2. Go ahead: Make my day.¹



b. Indicate that a list is coming.

i. The items we will need for our amateur attempts at exorcism include the following: a Bible, some rosary beads, and some risotto in case we get hungry.

★ **BUT BEWARE: You may not use a colon to start a list directly after a verb. For example, "We will need: a bible, some rosary beads, and some risotto," is INCORRECT!**



c. Mark time.

i. It's 1:15, I'm a tad intoxicated, and I require your company.

THE DASH

1. — ← This is what it looks like.

2. How to Make a Dash

- First, type the word that will come before the dash.
- Second, WITHOUT hitting the spacebar, type in two hyphens.
- Third, WITHOUT hitting the spacebar, type the word that comes after the dash.
- Finally—and at long last—hit the spacebar and watch the dash form as if by magic.
- Do a happy dance to celebrate your dash creation.



← This is what your dance should look like.

3. **USES:** Use the dash (a) instead of parentheses, (b) in place of a comma pair, or (c) in place of ellipses for *creative emphasis*.

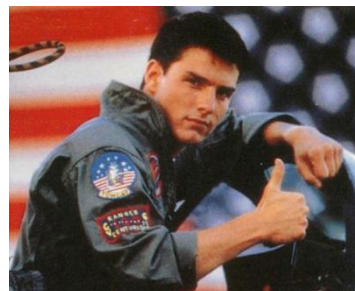
- Without plutonium, the force required to power the DeLorean—1.21 gigawatts—can only be generated by a bolt of lightning.



3

- And the three men I admire most—the father, son, and the Holy Ghost—they caught the last train for the coast the day the music died.¹

- I feel the need—the need for speed!²



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¹ “American Pie,” Don McLean

² *Top Gun*, Tom Cruise

³ <http://cdn.whatculture.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/doc-and-marty.jpg>

⁴ http://i2.cdnds.net/11/35/618_movies_tom_cruise.jpg