# 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.

Do NOT use a 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).

Do NOT use a 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.