

# Help Centres – English Support



## Commas, Semicolons & Colons

### A. When to use commas:

1. After introductory words, phrases, or dependent clauses

*Jeff, please close the door.*

*Barking loudly, the dog ran in circles*

*Before we go to the movie, I have to wash the dishes.*

2. Before a coordinating conjunction joining two independent clauses

*I would like to go to the movie, but I'm too tired.*

3. Before and after a phrase containing non-essential information or an interrupting clause

*Nick, who struggled with grades in high school, is doing quite well in college.*

*Watching English movies, for example, is an excellent way to improve listening skills.*

4. Between items in a series

*I had soup, salad, and a sandwich for lunch.*

5. After a conjunctive adverb

*My course schedule will be heavy next term; therefore, I've decided to cut back my other activities.*

### B. When to use semicolons:

1. Between two related sentences

*Jessica loves swimming; she hates scuba diving.*

2. Before a conjunctive adverb

*My sister loves travelling; therefore, she's always looking for the best travel deals.*

**3. To separate items in a list when the items already contain commas**

*I've traveled to a number of places, such as Paris, France; London, England; and Montreal, Quebec*

**C. When to use colons:**

**1. To explain or give an example:**

*We had my favourite food for dinner: pizza. (Pizza=my favourite food)*

*The thing he feared happened: he lost his job. (Losing his job=the thing he feared)*

**2. To introduce a quotation after a complete sentence:**

*Smith describes ways in which the virus is transmitted: "....."*

**3. To introduce a list after a complete sentence:**

*I like the following vegetables: carrots, peas, and potatoes.*

**BUT** no colon is used after an incomplete thought

*The vegetables I like are carrots, peas, and potatoes.*

*I like root vegetables, such as carrots, turnips, and parsnips.*

**Practice**

**A. In the following sentences, add or remove commas as necessary.**

1. Katsuo, and Chandra are classmates.
2. I enjoy gardening, when the sun is shining.
3. Kelly took the train and the ferry while she was traveling in Europe.
4. Victoria is on an island; however it doesn't feel like one because it's so large.
5. Squinting out the window I saw the car in the street.

**B. Add or remove semi colons and colons as necessary. You might also have to replace another punctuation mark with a semi colon. Some sentences might be correct.**

1. The grammar course will be useful, I hope I have room for it in my schedule.
2. Canadian cities I've visited include Toronto, Ontario, Vancouver, BC, and St. John's, Newfoundland.
3. I think I know what kind of tree that is; an oak.
4. Because his daughter was ill; Arnav had to leave work early.
5. I love tangerines; I'm glad they are available all year.
6. The grand prize is something many people would want; a new car.
7. My mother described her immigration to Canada "....."