

# Semicolons and Colons

To use this handout, you must first understand the difference between an independent clause and a dependent clause.

- An independent clause is a phrase that contains a subject and verb and that can stand alone as a complete sentence.
- A dependent clause is a phrase that does not contain a subject and a verb, cannot stand alone as a complete sentence, and must be reworded or attached to an independent clause to form a complete sentence.

## Use a semicolon

- To connect two independent clauses using "transition words" (such as *consequently*, *however*, *moreover*, *besides*, *nevertheless*, *on the other hand*, *in fact*, *therefore*, or *thus*).

*Example:* I'm not hungry; therefore, I'd rather not go to dinner with you.

- To connect two independent clauses.

*Example:* I don't want to go to dinner with you tonight; I'm not hungry.

- To separate a dependent clause from an independent clause.

*Example:* After the vote, our school colors will be either red, white and blue; green and gold; or marigold, chartreuse, and eggshell.

## Use a colon

- To introduce a second, closely related independent clause when it explains the first part of the sentence:

*Example:* I do know this: that child is not my son.

- To introduce a list after an independent clause (as long as the list does not separate the subject and verb or other necessary parts of the sentence). The colon states "that is."

*Example:* You can count on two things in life: death and taxes.

- To introduce a quotation.

*Example:* The Gettysburg Address is often quoted: "Four score and seven years ago..."