

Punctuation

- **Semi-colons, colons and dashes to mark independent clauses**
- **Colons and semi-colons in lists**
- **Hyphens to avoid ambiguity**



Using Semi-Colons to link clauses



Semi-colons are used in formal writing.

Semi-colons can be used to link two independent clauses that are *closely related*.

We tried as hard as we could. We crashed within seconds.

We tried as hard as we could; we crashed within seconds.



Our machine had taken months to build; it was now in pieces.

We swam for the shore; the crowd applauded and laughed.

The **semi-colon** emphasises the *close link*.

It links main clauses like a co-ordinating conjunction. The two clauses have *equal weight*.

To link two clauses: replace the full stop with a semi-colon and then use lower case to start the second main clause.



Using Colons to link clauses

Colons are used slightly differently.

They also show a link between clauses, when *the second clause expands the first*.

She flew a record-breaking distance. Her craft was aerodynamic.

She flew a record-breaking distance: her craft was aerodynamic.



She deserved her success: she had planned her design carefully.

She was overwhelmed: she had not expected to break the record.

Colons are used
in formal
writing.

The **colon** emphasises how the second clause expands on the first.

It links clauses like a subordinating conjunction. The second clause has *less weight* than the first.

To link two clauses: replace the full stop with a **colon** and then use lower case to start the second main clause.



Using Dashes to link clauses

We can use **dashes** like colons and semi-colons.
They indicate grammatical breaks.
They are used in informal writing—the rules are less precise.

My heart was beating like crazy—it was awesome .



I'm so proud—I can't wait to tell Nan.

It just kept going—you're a complete hero.

Dashes are used
in informal
writing.



To link two clauses: replace the full stop with a **dash** and then use lower case to start the second main clause.

Colons in lists

Colons can be used to introduce lists.

We use them if the list comes after an *independent clause*.



You may be required to bring many items: custard pies, a towel and a change of clothes.



I was most impressed by the following: the size of the beards, the range of styles and the care that was taken.



To be successful you should try your best, listen to instructions and have fun.

The **colon** comes after the independent clause.

We do not use a colon if the words before are not an independent clause.

'To be successful you should' is not an independent clause. We do not use a colon.

Semi-Colons in lists

Semi-colons can be used to separate items in lists.

We use them when it will make the list clearer.

The sights we saw amazed us: bright lights; babies, supported by their parents, in the centre of the arena; an enthusiastic, noisy, shouting crowd; and, watching carefully, a group of expert-looking judges.

The sights we saw amazed us: bright lights, babies, supported by their parents, in the centre of the arena, an enthusiastic, noisy, shouting crowd and, watching carefully, a group of expert-looking judges.

The **semi-colons** separate the four items:

- lights
- babies
- crowd
- judges

Without **semi-colons** it is not clear how many items there are.

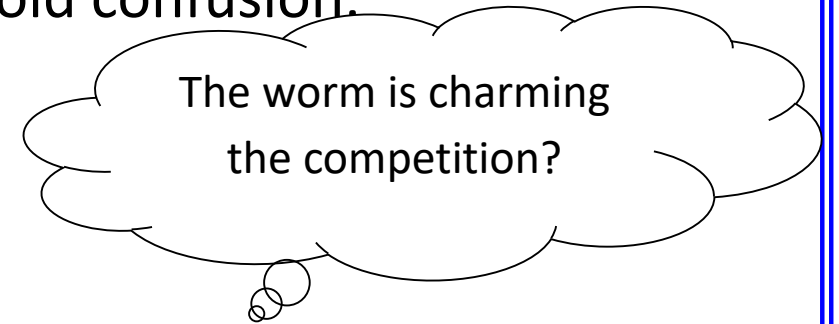
When the items in a list already include commas, it helps to use semi-colons.

Using hyphens to avoid ambiguity

Hyphens can be used to join compound adjectives to avoid confusion.

a worm charming competition

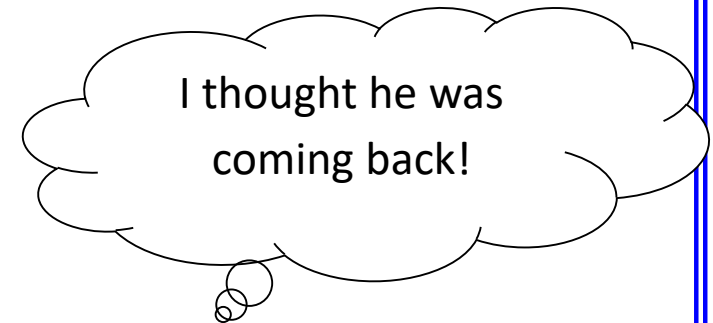
a worm-charming competition



Hyphens can be used with prefixes to avoid confusion.

Satnam resigned last week.

Satnam re-signed last week.



Hyphens can also be used when a prefix creates repeated vowels e.g. re-enter (not reenter)