

the Writing Centers at Saint Mary's

Winona and Minneapolis

Grammar and Punctuation: Semicolons and Colons

Semicolons and colons are special punctuation marks, which means that they should only be used when necessary.

Semicolons

#1 Use a semicolon to connect two complete and related sentences.

Example: *To understand how artificial sweeteners function in humans, Johnson et al. (2013) conducted a longitudinal study over the course of five years; in the study, researchers found that artificial sweeteners affected several metabolic processes.*

#2 Use a semicolon to separate items in an extended list.

Examples: *Smith (2014) found that artificial sweeteners had the following effects: increased blood sugar by 12.4% for two hours following consumption; raised A1C by 3% over a six-month period; and created negative gut flora within just one hour of consumption.*

Participants were asked to self report their daily calorie consumption; their consumption of artificial sweeteners, which included added sweeteners; and their daily exercise, which was found not to be a contributing factor (Johnson et al., 2013).

Colons

#1 Use a colon to set off an extended list or block quotation.

Example: *Smith (2014) found that artificial sweeteners had the following effects: increased blood sugar by 12.4% for two hours following consumption; raised A1C by 3% over a six-month period; and created negative gut flora within just one hour of consumption.*

#2 Use a colon to connect an independent clause to information that expands on it.

Example: *Smith (2014) noted one major flaw in the study: participants self-reported their consumption of artificial sweeteners.*

*Semicolons should not be used to join an independent clause to a phrase or clause. Here is an example of this common mistake:

When researchers looked at the consumption of artificial sweeteners; they found it varied immensely (Johnson et al., 2013).

The dependent clause (in red) at the start of the sentence needs to be connected to a complete sentence (independent clause) with a comma and not a semicolon.