

Meet the CADS:

Colons, Apostrophes, Dashes, and Semicolons

Colons

Colons are often used to introduce or to separate. Colons must follow a complete sentence, but what follows the colon can be a list, word, phrase, etc.

Examples

The campers must bring their own equipment: tent, sleeping bag, flashlight, bedroll.
Martin received a great gift for Christmas: money.

Apostrophes—Possession

Use an apostrophe to show possession. Apostrophes are used to show **possession**, or ownership. People often put an apostrophe after any noun that ends in "s," but an apostrophe is only necessary if possession is shown.

Example

The dog's bowl is empty. The cartoon dogs bowl every Saturday night.

- The first time we have the word "dogs," there is an apostrophe because the bowl belongs to the dog.
- In the second sentence, the word "dogs" does not have an apostrophe because it is simply a plural form of the word.
- If you are showing possession with a singular noun, then the apostrophe comes before the "s": dog's, person's, George's, Angus's.
- If you are showing possession with a plural noun, then the apostrophe comes after the "s": horses', pilgrims', soldiers'.
- If you have a singular verb that ends in "s" already, you can either put the apostrophe after the "s" or add an apostrophe and then an "s": Phineas' or Phineas's.
- Finally, if the plural version of the noun does not end in "s," you have to add an apostrophe and then the "s": children's, women's, etc.

Apostrophes—Contraction

Use an apostrophe to mark a contraction. A **contraction** is a combination of two words that leaves out one or more letters.

Example

such as *don't* (do not), *can't* (can not), and *won't* (will not).

Dashes

A dash is made by typing two hyphens side by side with no spaces on either side—like this. A dash is used as an informal comma or colon. When you interrupt a sentence with a phrase or word, you can put dashes around the interrupter. A dash can be used in the same way as a colon; a dash is more informal than a comma.

Examples

My older brother—the one I was telling you about who married an astronaut—doesn't like Tang or freeze-dried food. (interrupter)

There's exactly one thing I can do like nobody else—use dashes. (informal colon)

Semicolons

Part period, part comma. A semicolon can be used instead of a period at the end of one sentence in order to combine it with the sentence that follows, but this can only be done if the two sentences are closely related. Conjunctive adverbs (however, therefore, nevertheless, etc.) are often used right after a semicolon to further illustrate the relationship between the two sentences, as seen in the second example. People often confuse a semicolon with a comma. To check whether a semicolon is appropriate, make sure that the group of words on either side of it is actually a complete sentence.

Examples

Marie is a pessimist; her husband is an optimist.

I do not like cantaloupe; nevertheless, I encourage my daughter to eat it.

Marie is a pessimist; however, she plays the lottery thinking she might actually win.

