

## Colons and Dashes<sup>1</sup>—When to use them<sup>2</sup>

Use a *colon* after words such as ‘the following’ (there needs to be an independent clause<sup>3</sup> before the colon)...

The party needs the following items: food, drink and decorations.  
(*correct*)

The party needs the following items—food drink and decorations.  
(*incorrect*)

Use a *dash* after a series of words that give details about the statement after...

Food, drink and decorations—that’s what the party needs.  
(*correct*)

Food, drink and decorations: that’s what the party needs.  
(*incorrect*)

Use a *colon* to indicate a quotation that is formally announced...

Billy once made this statement: “Psalms is better than Proverbs.”  
(*correct*)

Billy once made this statement—“Psalms is better than Proverbs.”  
(*incorrect*)

Use a *dash* to break off a sentence or show faltering speech...

“Some time or other he *will* be—but it shall not be by *me*<sup>4</sup>.”  
(*correct*)

“Some time or other he *will* be: but it shall not be by *me*.”  
(*incorrect*)

Use a *colon* between independent clauses when the second clause modifies the first...

Julie seemed to really enjoy the concert: she came back a changed person.  
(*correct*)

Julie seemed to really enjoy the concert—she came back a changed person.  
(*incorrect*)

Use a *dash* to emphasize a specific portion...

After the show—beautiful as they were—we took the decorations down.  
(*correct*)

After the show: beautiful as they were: we took the decorations down.  
(*incorrect*)

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<sup>1</sup> Dashes (—) are longer than hyphens (-)

<sup>2</sup> All grammar rules found in: Chapman, James A. Grammar and Composition. Pensacola, FL: A Beka Book, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> An independent clause is one that does not modify anything and can stand alone as a complete sentence

<sup>4</sup> Austen, Jane. Pride and Prejudice. Hungary: Könemann Verlagsgesellschaft, 1996.