

Use a *colon* after words such as ‘the following’ (there needs to be an independent clause¹ before the colon).

- Correct: The party needs the following items: food, drink and decorations.
Incorrect: The party needs the following items—food drink and decorations.

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

- Correct: Food, drink and decorations—that’s what the party needs.
Incorrect: Food, drink and decorations: that’s what the party needs.

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

- Correct: Billy once made this statement: “Psalms is better than Proverbs.”
Incorrect: Billy once made this statement—“Psalms is better than Proverbs.”

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

- Correct: “Some time or other he *will* be—but it shall not be by *me*².”
Incorrect: “Some time or other he *will* be: but it shall not be by *me*.”

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

- Correct: Julie seemed to really enjoy the concert: she came back a changed person.
Incorrect: Julie seemed to really enjoy the concert—she came back a changed person.

Use a *dash* to emphasize a specific portion.

- Correct: After the show—beautiful as they were—we took the decorations down.
Incorrect: After the show: beautiful as they were: we took the decorations down.

¹ An independent clause is one that does not modify anything and can stand alone as a complete sentence

² Austen, Jane. Pride and Prejudice. Hungary: Könemann Verlagsgesellschaft, 1996.