



• Colons •

Not to be confused with the semicolon, which functions similarly to the comma, the **colon** introduces information.

When a sentence is complete but you want to add more detailed information, a colon does the trick. But the thing to remember is that *a colon must follow a complete sentence*—if the sentence is incomplete, then a colon isn't necessary.

This position requires a candidate with expertise in many design skills: familiarity with Photoshop, training in web design, and knowledge of image composition.

This position requires a candidate who: is familiar with Photoshop, has training in web design, and knows basic image composition. (Extraneous colon!)

In this second example, that colon is unnecessary, because the sentence *requires* the listed information in order to be a whole sentence. It's better in this case to rewrite the sentence:

This position requires a candidate who is familiar with Photoshop, has training in web design, and knows basic image composition, among other design skills.

• Dashes •

There are three different types of dash, each of which serves a different grammatical function:

1. Hyphen (-): joins together words to function as single words

For instance, if you want to describe something as being the color of a pumpkin, you can describe it as being “**pumpkin-colored.**”

It can also connect words that aren't physically connected on the page, like for instance, to say “**two- and three-year-old children.**” Here, the hyphen after “two” connects it to “-year-old” without them having to be physically right next to each other.

Finally, the hyphen can indicate a word that's been broken up due to print formatting, for instance if you have a page that looks something like this:

One of the worst hazards about walk-
ing around barefoot, alongside the
possibility of getting burned, is bro-
ken glass.

The thing to remember about this type of hyphen use is that words should not be split randomly—they can only be split between syllables.

2. N-dash, or En-dash (–): indicates a range

The N-dash is so named because it is the length of the letter N, and it is used mainly to separate numbers or dates to show a range. For instance: January 2014 – July 2015.

The N-dash can also be used as a connector in non-sentence language, such as:

1st President – George Washington

2nd President – John Adams

N-dashes are not, however, to be confused with the third type of dash:

3. M-dash, or Em-dash (—): separates parts of sentences

The M-dash is the length of the letter M and is a very versatile punctuation mark. It separates different parts of sentences and can stand in for commas, semicolons, and colons:

The first image depicts whimsical fairies in harmonious reds, greens and blues, but the second only shows a dark forest of trees.

The first image depicts whimsical fairies in harmonious reds, greens and blues—but the second only shows a dark forest of trees.

Final Fantasy is one of his favorite games; its art is vibrant, rich, and majestic.

Final Fantasy is one of his favorite games—its art is vibrant, rich, and majestic.

All of my best friends share certain characteristics: kindness, tolerance, and the instinct to listen first and judge later.

All of my best friends share certain characteristics—kindness, tolerance, and the instinct to listen first and judge later.

The M-dash doesn't adhere too closely to its own set of rules; rather, it's extremely versatile and the usage varies according to what sort of tone and mood the writer wishes to create.