



Using Semi-colons and Colons

Using a Semi-colon

A semi-colon contains a comma and a full stop. It is helpful to remember this. A semi-colon is stronger than a comma, but not as final as a full stop.

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Semi-colons are used to link sentences that are closely related.

For example:

The wood was silent and absolutely still; Little Red Riding Hood realised that she had not truly seen its beauty until now.

A semi-colon works perfectly here to allow a smooth transition between sentences.

A full stop between the sentences might detract from the impact of Little Red Riding Hood's observation and create too great a 'stop'. Using a comma here would be incorrect; a comma cannot be used to link two independent sentences.

Semi-colons can also be used to link one sentence to another closely related sentence that uses a **conjunctive adverb**.


For example:

The wolf liked Little Red Riding Hood. Nevertheless, he was looking forward to eating her.

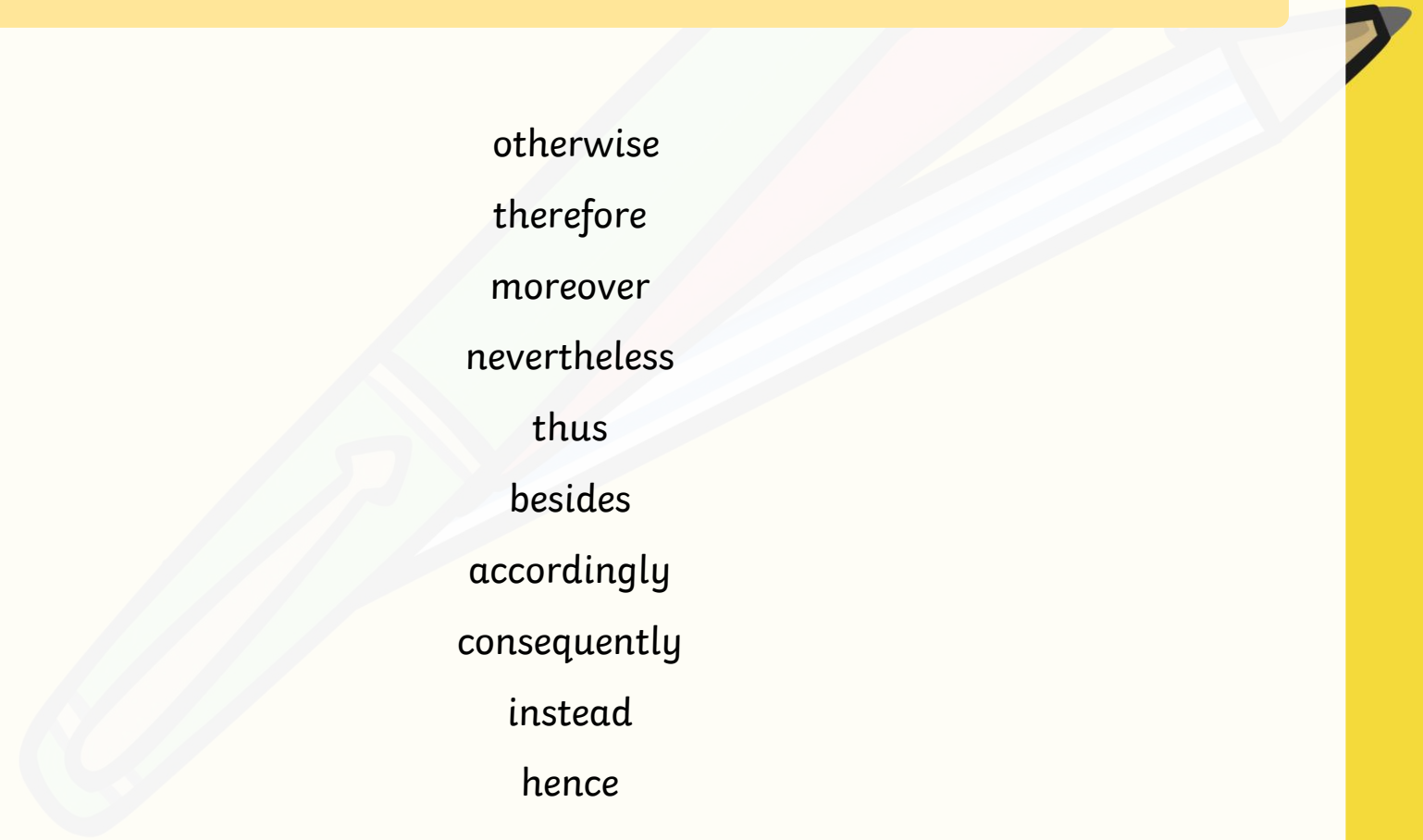
The wolf liked Little Red Riding Hood; nevertheless, he was looking forward to eating her.

Little Red Riding Hood didn't like the forest much. However, she did like visiting Grandma.

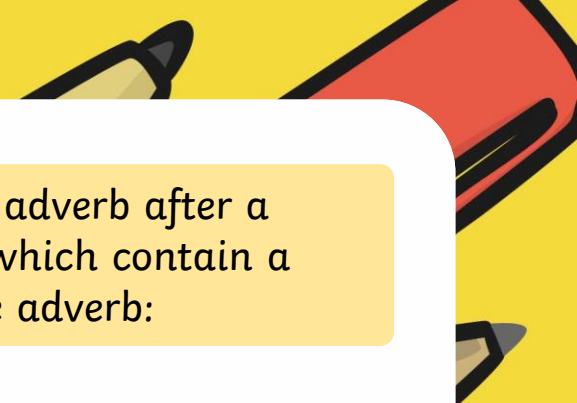
Little Red Riding Hood didn't like the forest much; however, she did like visiting Grandma.



Other examples of conjunctive adverbs which could be preceded by a semi-colon:



otherwise
therefore
moreover
nevertheless
thus
besides
accordingly
consequently
instead
hence



However, you do not *always* have to use a conjunctive adverb after a semi-colon. Here are some great examples of sentences which contain a semi-colon that is **not** followed by a conjunctive adverb:

Grandad is going bald; his hair gets thinner each time we see him.

We had too many fumbles; we lost the game.

Shaun wanted to call our new puppy Scritch; I hated the name.

I am so sorry; will you ever be able to forgive me?

As you can see in these sentences, using a semi-colon works perfectly to allow a smooth transition between sentences.

A semi-colon can also be used to separate items in a list (where the list also contains commas).

For example:

There are lots of characters in the story: Big Bad Wolf, the baddie; Little Red Riding Hood, the heroine; Grandma, the victim; and Mr Woodcutter, the rescuer.

We spoke to the main characters: Grandma, 81; Big Bad Wolf, 30; Little Red Riding Hood, 11; and Mr Woodcutter, 55.



Using a Colon

A colon looks like two full stops, one above the other. A helpful thing to remember about colons is that because they look like two full stops, they can only be used at the end of an independent clause.

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Colons are used to expand a sentence.

A colon is used to introduce an idea that is an explanation or continuation of the one that comes before the colon.

For example:

There was only one thing the wolf wanted to do now: eat that juicy Little Red Riding Hood.

The flaw in the wolf's plan was clear to see: he looked nothing like Grandma.



Colons are used to introduce a list.

For example:

There were a few reasons that the wolf did not make a convincing Grandma: his eyes, his ears, his gruff voice and his sharp, pointy teeth.

Little Red Riding Hood carried a selection of provisions for Grandma: a loaf of bread, some apples and a freshly-wrapped pat of butter.



Useful Summary

Context	Semi-colon?	Colon?
To introduce a list		✓
To separate items in a list	✓	
To link closely related sentences	✓	
To expand a given idea		✓
To introduce a quotation		✓
To join sentences which use an adverbial	✓	