Colons & Semicolons

First the rules, then the logic behind them:

**COLONS**: Use a colon (:) to show expectation, except when there is no pause.

Compare the following examples:

A) Bring to class the following: pens, paper, and dictionaries.

B) Bring to class your pens, paper, and dictionaries.

**SEMICOLONs**: Use a comma to separate main clauses if they are joined by and, but, or, for, nor, or yet; otherwise, use a semicolon or period. In other words, you can use a semicolon wherever you might otherwise use a period.

Compare the following examples:

A) He did not write his paper; therefore he will receive an “incomplete”.

B) He did not write his paper, and therefore he will receive an incomplete.

**WHY USE A COLON?** A colon can be used, sometimes, to create something of a drum-roll of expectation in a sentence. For example:

They would never get out of there: the boat was stuck underneath the fallen trunk.

**WHY USE A SEMICOLON?** A semicolon does not bring your reader to a halt; it just slows him down a little. It is particularly useful when you, as a writer, are trying to avoid choppiness of style and are still trying to bring together thoughts more diverse than an *and* or a *but* can glue together. It tells the reader, “Stop, but don’t stop too long; these ideas are connected.”