

Principal Skinner's guide to commas, semicolons, and colons

Commas:

1. Commas should be used after each item in a list, where it can replace an "and."
 - a. Homer's favorite places are Moe's Tavern The Quickie Mart and the couch. (wrong)
 - b. Homer's favorite places are Moe's Tavern, The Quickie Mart, and the couch. (right)
2. Commas should be used to separate adjectives in a description, but only if it should replace an "and."
 - a. Bart Simpson is a rude little boy. (just fine, because "little" is more a part of "boy" than a descriptive word about Bart)
 - b. Bart Simpson is a rude ill mannered spiky-haired little boy. (wrong, because "ill mannered" and "spiky-haired" describe Bart, but don't necessarily define a boy)
 - c. Bart Simpson is a rude, ill mannered, spiky-haired little boy. (right)
3. Commas should be used to join two independent clauses with coordinating conjunctions. (and, or, nor, but, so, yet, for) These clauses must also relate.
 - a. Marge Simpson is a loving wife, and Mr. Burns is old. (wrong, because the clauses are not related)
 - b. Marge Simpson is a loving wife and Homer is a lucky husband. (wrong)
 - c. Marge Simpson is a loving wife, and Homer is a lucky husband. (right)
4. Commas should be used to set off direct speech.

- a. Superintendent Chaulmers angrily shouted “Skinner!” (wrong)
- b. Superintendent Chaulmers angrily shouted, “Skinner!” (right)

Semicolons:

Semicolons should be used to join independent clauses without conjunctions. Again, the clauses must be related.

1. Marge Simpson is a loving wife, Homer is a lucky husband. (wrong)
2. Marge Simpson is a loving wife; Homer is a lucky husband. (right)

Colons:

Colons should be used, basically, to introduce things such as long formal quotations, long lists, and antithetical statements.

1. Comic Book Guy, in his dissertation on the Justice League of America, says that <insert quote here> (wrong)
2. Comic Book Guy, in his dissertation on the Justice League of America, says that: <insert quote here> (right)
3. Homer Simpson, in his life, has held the following occupations nuclear technician, astronaut, country music manager, fast food cook, etc. (wrong)
4. Homer Simpson, in his life, has held the following occupations: nuclear technician, astronaut, country music manager, fast food cook, etc. (right)
5. Homer eats Mr. Burns dines. (wrong)
6. Homer eats: Mr. Burns dines. (right)