

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**.

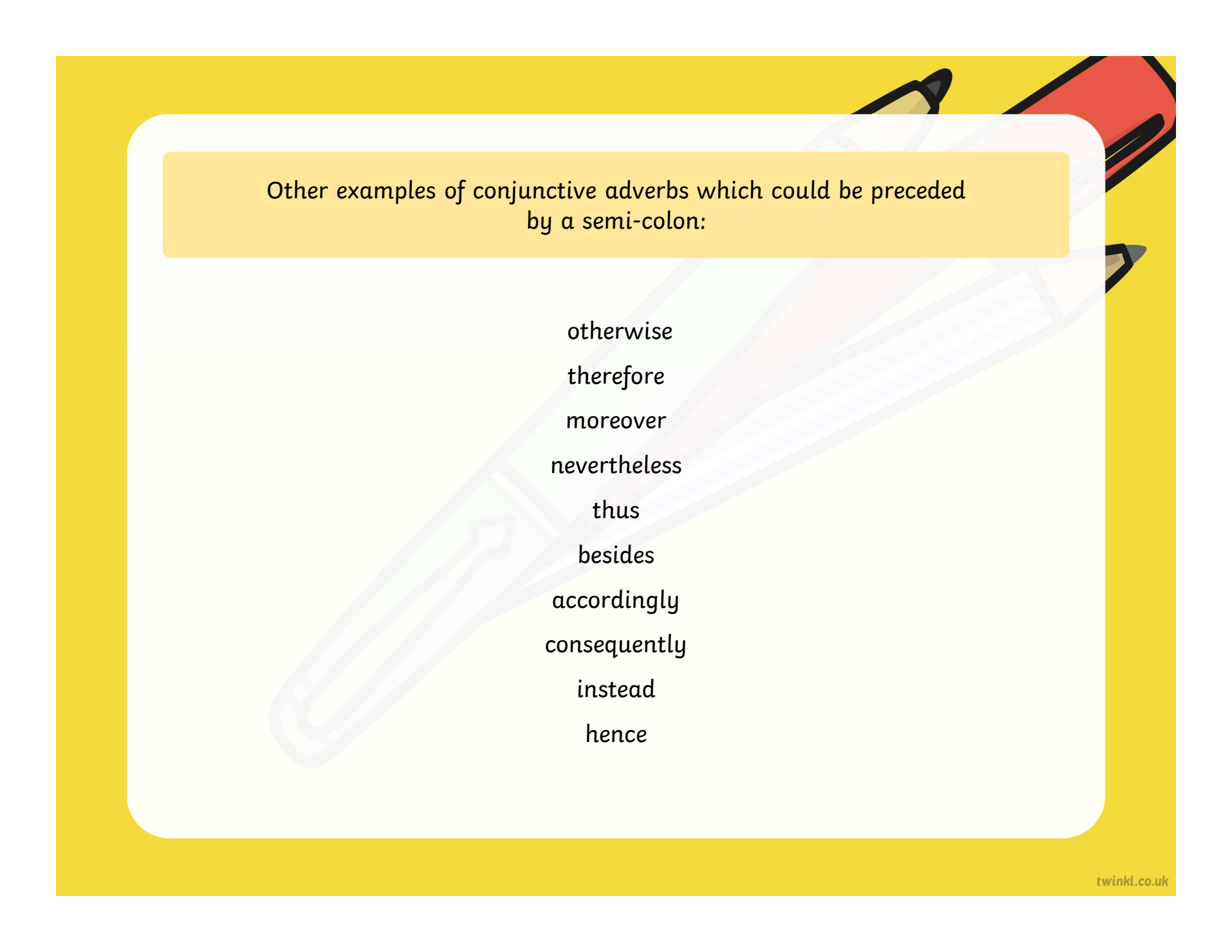
For example:

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.



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	✓	



**Semi-colon or
Colon?
Quiz**



Question 1


A or B: which is punctuated correctly?

A

I love the sound of the birds singing; however, I hate being woken up by them.

B

I love the sound of the birds singing: however, I hate being woken up by them.

 = correct

 = incorrect

Question 2


A or B: which is punctuated correctly?

A

The woods here are beautiful; peaceful, quiet and lush.

B

The woods here are beautiful: peaceful, quiet and lush.

 = correct

 = incorrect

Question 3


A or B: which is punctuated correctly?

A

Mother's words came to me; 'Take care in the woods!'

B

Mother's words came to me: 'Take care in the woods!'

 = correct

 = incorrect

Question 4


A or B: which is punctuated correctly?

A

Little Red Riding Hood took the map with her; it was not very helpful.

B

Little Red Riding Hood took the map with her: it was not very helpful.

 = correct

 = incorrect

