Joining Full Sentences with ; : and –

Teacher		**Class**	Year 6
Subject	English	**Topic**	Semicolons, colons and dashes
Date		**Room**	
Lesson length	60 minutes	**Country**	United Kingdom

Pupils learn to join independent clauses with semicolons, colons and dashes. They build, compare and proofread joined sentences in pairs.

Curriculum links

- Use of the semi-colon, colon and dash to mark the boundary between independent clauses [for example, It's raining; I'm fed up] [1]
- Use the semi-colon, colon and dash e.g. when writing lists or as the boundary between independent clauses [2]

Learning objectives

- Students will join two independent clauses with a semicolon, colon or dash.
- Students will choose the mark to show equal link, explanation or chatty break.
- Students will proofread boundaries and explain why each mark was chosen.

Success criteria

- I can join two full sentences with ; : or –.
- I can pick the best mark for link, explanation or chatty surprise.
- I can check both sides stand alone and explain my choice.

What students already know

Hold up: It rained. Ask: is this a full sentence? How do you know? Listen for: it has a doer and action and makes sense alone.

Key words

independent clause	a group of words that can stand alone as a sentence [6]
semicolon	the mark ; that links two close, equal complete thoughts [8]
colon	the mark : that tells the reader an explanation is coming next [6]
dash	the mark – that makes a casual, sudden break for surprise [6][3]
boundary	the place where one complete thought ends and the next begins

Materials

- sentence-strip cards cut in two for It rained. / The game stopped. and other Slide 9 pairs
- large ; : – cards for each pair
- mini whiteboards and pens
- Slides 1–5, 7–12
- Video clip 2 (0:00–3:45) ready on Slide 8

Before the lesson

- Print and cut sentence-strip cards using Slide 9 pairs and one statutory pair It's raining / I'm fed up [1]
- Make large ; : – cards and check mini whiteboards work
- Test Video clip 2 (0:00–3:45) on Slide 8 and load Slides 1–12
- Set tables for pairs with space to hold up large marks

Lesson outline

0–5 min **Starter** 5 min · Whole class

To hook pupils and recall what counts as a full sentence.

YOU DO

1. Hold up two strips: It rained. and The game stopped. Say the hook: I have two complete sentences in my hands. No joining word allowed. Who can glue them together with just a mark?
2. Show Slide 1 title, then Slide 2 vote with The game was lost: we were gutted.
3. Take a quick vote: keep the colon for calm explanation, swap to semicolon for equal link, or swap to dash for big drama.
4. Link votes to learning goal: today we will join two independent clauses with a semicolon, colon or dash.

STUDENTS DO

1. Look at the two strips and vote for colon, semicolon or dash.
2. Tell a partner why both halves still sound complete alone.

Say: I have two complete sentences in my hands. No and, but or so is allowed. Your job is to glue them together with just one mark. Which mark would you pick and why?

Ask: Why can It rained. stand alone as a sentence? (It has a subject and verb and makes a complete thought [6].) · What changes if we swap the colon for a dash? (It feels more chatty and dramatic, like a less formal semicolon [6].)

Check understanding: Hands up for ; : – choice. If split, keep both ideas and say we will test them. If unsure what stands alone, model the full stop test quickly.

Support: Show the two strips with the verbs underlined so pupils see two complete thoughts. **Stretch:** Ask confident pupils to say the joined sentence aloud with a clear pause at the boundary.

Use: Slides 1–2

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5–17 min **Teaching** 12 min · Whole class

To teach what each mark does between two independent clauses.

YOU DO

1. Teach independent clause as a group of words that can stand alone as a sentence and always has a subject and verb [6], using Slide 3 steps.
2. Show Slide 4 cards: semicolon links two close, equal ideas; colon means second part explains the first [6]; dash adds a sudden, chatty break and is often used in less formal writing [3].
3. Use Slide 5 mystery to reveal the semicolon with It's raining; I'm fed up.
4. Model the full stop test: cover each side in turn to check it stands alone [6].

STUDENTS DO

1. Chant the three rules with actions: linked hands for ;, pointing forward for :, jazz hands for –.
2. Copy the three example joins on mini whiteboards and underline the boundary mark.

Say: Both sides must be full sentences. A semicolon shows they are closely linked. A colon shows the second part explains the first. A dash shows a casual, surprising break.

Worked example: It's raining; I'm fed up. Step 1: cover the second half — It's raining. stands alone. Step 2: cover the first half — I'm fed up. stands alone. Step 3: choose ; because the ideas are equal and closely linked [8]. Swap to colon — It's raining: I'm fed up — now the second part explains the first [8]. Swap to dash — more chatty and sudden [6].

Ask: How do you know each side is an independent clause? (Each side has a subject and verb and makes sense alone [6].) · When would you pick a colon rather than a semicolon? (When the second part explains or expands on the first [8].) · Why might a writer pick a dash? (For an informal, surprising break, like a less formal semicolon [6][3].)

Check understanding: Mini whiteboards up with ; : – meanings in own words. Reteach any mixed colon/semicolon with one more pair if needed.

Support: Give a word bank: linked, explains, chatty, with a colour for each mark. **Stretch:** Ask pupils to explain what link is lost if we use a full stop instead [8].

Use: Slides 3–5

17–37 min **Main activity** 20 min · Pairs

To practise joining pairs of independent clauses with the best mark.

YOU DO

1. Give pairs sentence-strip cards cut in two, for example It's raining / I'm fed up [1], It rained. / The game stopped., I fell over. / That was embarrassing., I knew one thing. / We would lose.
2. Remind class a semicolon can separate two closely related independent clauses [6], a colon is used where the second clause explains more about the first [6], and a dash works like a less formal semicolon [6].
3. Ask pairs to test ; : and – in the gap, check both halves still make sense alone, then choose one large mark.
4. Lead show-back: pairs hold up their chosen large mark and read the joined sentence aloud with a clear pause at the boundary.

STUDENTS DO

1. Join each strip pair with ; : or –, checking both sides stand alone.
2. Hold up the large mark, read aloud with a pause, and write the best version on mini whiteboards.

Say: Test all three marks in the gap. Cover each side. Does it stand alone? Now decide: is it an equal link, an explanation, or a chatty surprise? Hold up your mark and read it with a pause.

Worked example: I fell over – that was embarrassing. Check: I fell over. stands alone. That was embarrassing. stands alone. Choose – because it is an informal, surprising break [6]. With ; it would sound neater and more equal. With : the second part would explain the first [6].

Ask: Why did you choose a colon here? (Because the second part explains or expands on the first [8].) · What shows your two halves are independent clauses? (Each half has a subject and verb and can be a sentence alone [6].)

Check understanding: Scan large marks and whiteboards for correct boundaries. If many choose the same mark for an explaining pair, remodel that pair as a class.

Support: Give pre-matched pairs using the same starter, so pupils only choose the mark. **Stretch:** Ask pupils to write the rule they used in one sentence: related, explains, or informal pause.

Use: Slide 9

37–50 min **Consolidate** 13 min · Whole class

To compare marks and explain why a writer chose one.

YOU DO

1. Play Video clip 2 (0:00–3:45) on Slide 8. Ask pupils to spot semicolon, colon and dash and decide which fits each gap.
2. Show Slide 10 compare: semicolon links two equal, close ideas and can swap for a full stop; colon means here comes the reason and the second part explains the first [8].
3. Pose Slide 11 in talk pairs: When is a dash better than a semicolon for joining sentences?
4. Collect answers: dash for chatty, punchy, informal writing [3]; semicolon for neat, formal equal link.

STUDENTS DO

1. Watch, spot the marks and whisper the best fit for each gap.
2. In pairs, sort two joins into equal link or explanation and practise saying why.

Say: Same ideas, different mark changes the feeling. If the second part gives the reason, pick a colon. If the ideas are equal partners, pick a semicolon. If you want a chatty jolt, pick a dash.

Worked example: I knew one thing: we would lose. The part after the colon explains the puzzle [8]. With a semicolon — I knew one thing; we would lose — it is just a close link and the explanatory punch is lost.

Ask: Does the second part just add on, or does it explain? (If it explains, use a colon where the second clause says more about the first [6].) · When is a dash better than a semicolon? (When writing is informal and needs energy or surprise [6][3].)

Check understanding: Voting cards for ; : – on two new gaps. If choices split, ask one pupil per corner to justify with linked / explains / chatty.

Support: Provide sentence frames: The second part tells me more that ___ / adds a linked idea that ___.
Stretch: Ask pupils to reword the second clause so a different mark becomes the best answer.

Use: Slide 8, Video clip 2 (0:00–3:45), Slides 10–11

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50–60 min **Plenary** 10 min · Whole class

To review the rules and check pupils can use all three marks.

YOU DO

1. Recap with Slide 7 mindmap: both sides stand alone, semicolon means equal link, colon means explanation next, dash means casual break, full stop test always works.
2. Ask pairs to turn one full stop pair into three versions and say how the tone shifts from formal to chatty.
3. Set Slide 12 exit ticket: write one sentence using ; : or –, one thing learnt, one question.

STUDENTS DO

1. Chant the rules map and clap for the punctuation pause.
2. Write the exit ticket on their own and underline the boundary mark.

Say: Remember the full stop test. If both sides stand alone and are close, you can join them. Now show me your best join and tell me why you picked that mark.

Ask: What must be true on both sides of ; : or – here? (Both sides must be independent clauses that can stand alone [6].) · What do you lose if you use a full stop instead of a semicolon? (You hide the close connection between the ideas [8].)

Check understanding: Collect exit tickets and sort into correct / explanation confused / fragment error to plan next spelling, punctuation and grammar starter.

Support: Give caption starters where the first clause is done and pupils only finish the second clause.
Stretch: Challenge pupils to keep the same first clause but change the mark and second clause to shift tone.

Use: Slides 7, 12

Common mistakes

Mistake	How to spot it	How to fix it
Joining two full sentences with a comma instead of ; : or –.	Long sentence with two verbs and a comma pause in the middle.	Split with a full stop to test each side stands alone [6], then rejoin with semicolon for a close link [8].
Using a colon when the second part does not explain the first.	Colon used for two equal ideas with no reason or expansion after it.	Ask: does it explain? The phrase after a colon usually explains or expands on what came before [8]. If not, use a semicolon.
Putting ; : or – next to a fragment that cannot stand alone.	One side has no verb or does not make sense covered up.	Cover each side and check it has a subject and verb and makes sense alone [6]. Fix the fragment first.

Support

- Give pre-matched pairs using the same starter, so pupils only choose the mark.
- Highlight the verb in each half so pupils can see two complete thoughts.
- Provide sentence frames for explaining: The mark is ___ because the second part ___.

Stretch

- Ask pupils to write the rule they used in one sentence: related, explains, or informal pause.
- Challenge pupils to re-punctuate with a full stop and discuss what link is lost.
- Challenge pupils to keep the same first clause but change the mark to shift tone from formal to chatty.

For the LSE or teaching assistant

Stay with the focus pair during the main activity. Help them underline verbs, cover and check each side stands alone, then choose from two marks only before trying all three.

Check for understanding

Question	Answer
Join these: It rained. The game stopped. using a semicolon.	It rained; the game stopped.
Which mark fits? I knew one thing: ___ We would lose. Why?	Colon, because the second clause explains the first [6].
True or false: both sides of ; : or – must stand alone as sentences?	True – each side must be an independent clause [6].

Homework

Write two joins about your evening: one with ; for a link and one with : for an explanation.

Sources

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