

Semicolons and Colons

*The balancing act of
punctuation*





Both semicolons and colons balance ideas on either side of them, but they are used in different situations.

Semicolons

Use the semicolon to separate main clauses (sentences) **not** joined by a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS).



It is best used to show contrasted or balanced ideas.

Each day is full of choice;
it also is full of opportunity.



He is still carving surfboards at the age of ninety;
he is still the finest.

Notice how each of these could be complete sentences on their own.

Each day is full of choice.
It also is full of opportunity.



He is still carving surfboards at the age of ninety.
He is still the finest.

Do NOT use a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS).

One way to add a more formal tone to your writing is to use the semicolon to combine your sentences with a conjunctive adverb. These are just bigger combining words.

Accordingly

However

Otherwise

Also

Indeed

Still

Besides

Instead

Then

Consequently

Moreover

Therefore

Furthermore

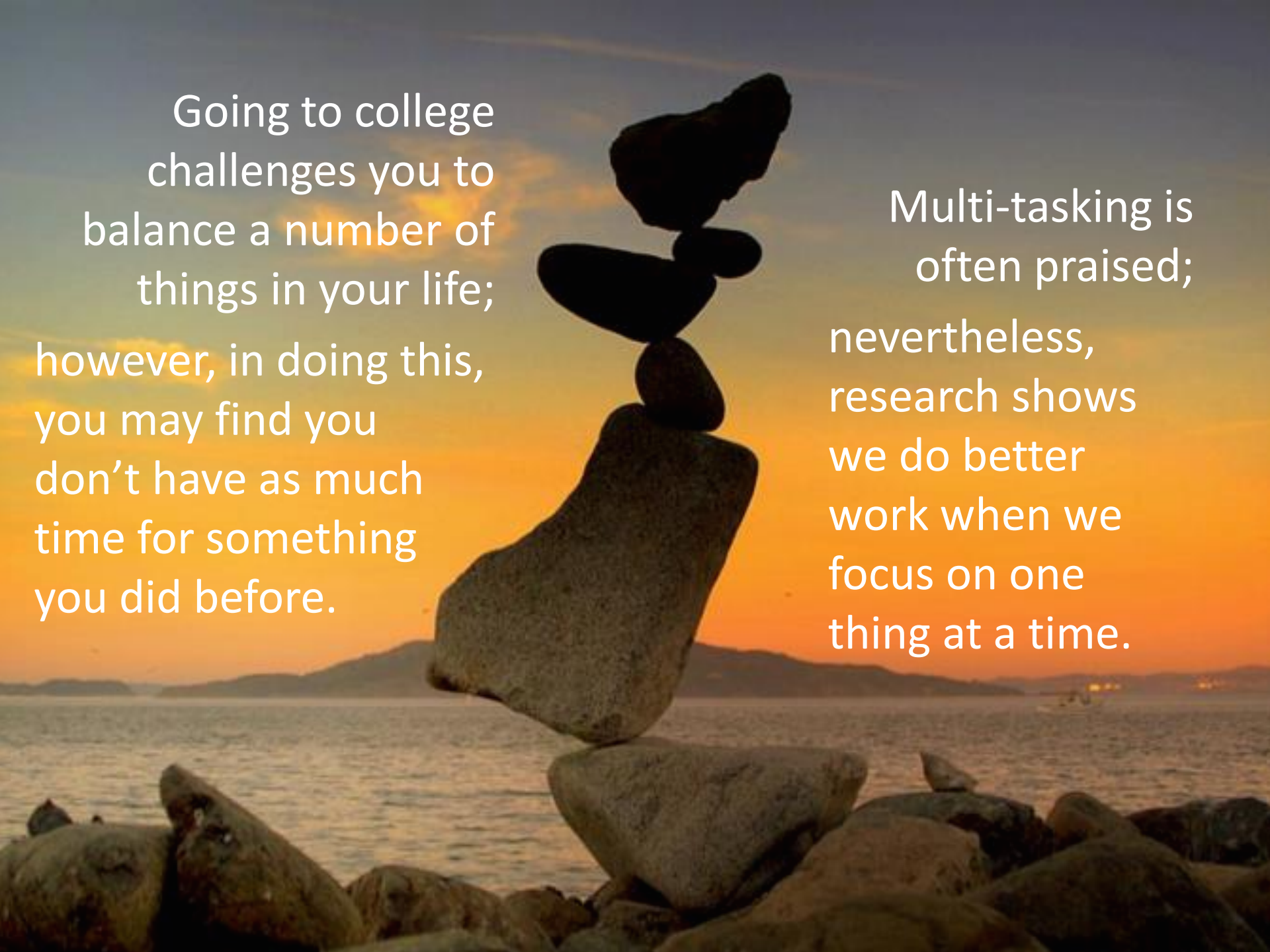
Nonetheless

Thus

Hence



When you use these, put a comma after them.



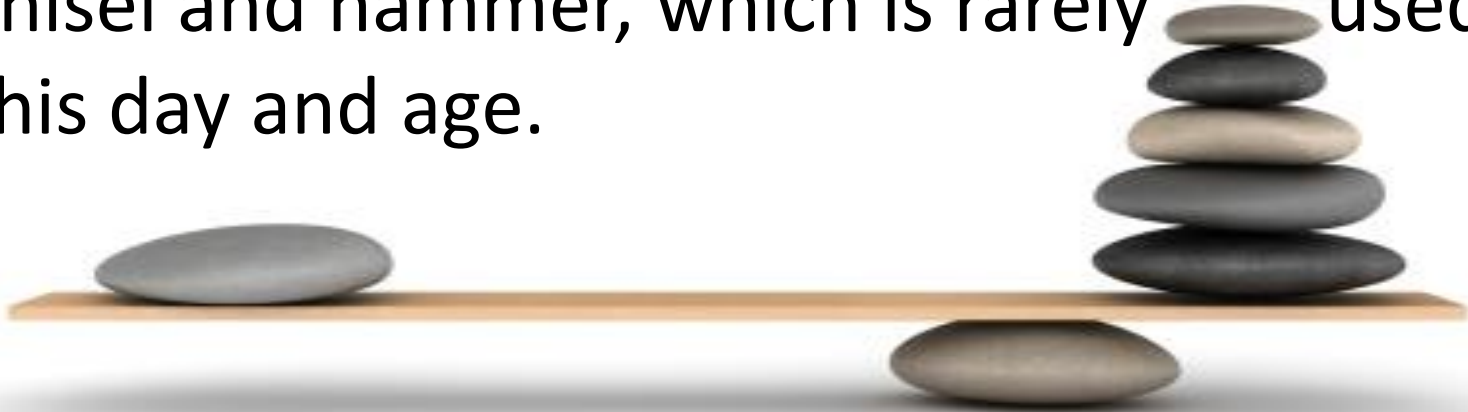
Going to college challenges you to balance a number of things in your life; however, in doing this, you may find you don't have as much time for something you did before.

Multi-tasking is often praised; nevertheless, research shows we do better work when we focus on one thing at a time.

Use the semicolon to separate items in a series **if** the items already contain commas.



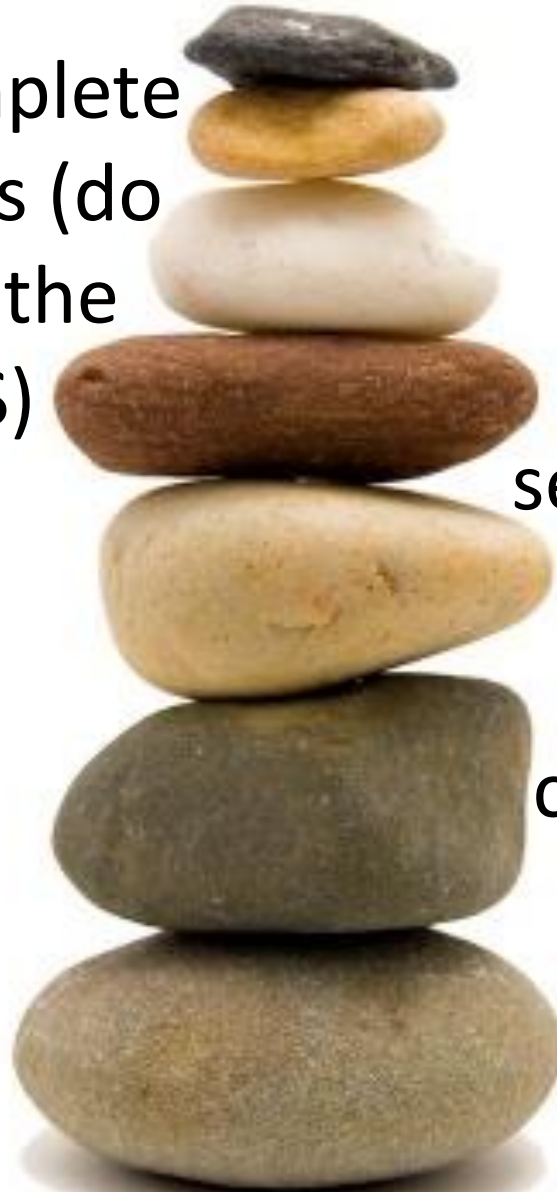
There are at least three ways to write: ¹ with a pen or pencil, which is inexpensive and easily accessible; ² by computer and printer, which is more expensive but quick and neat; ³ or with a chisel and hammer, which is rarely used this day and age.



We went to Reno, Nevada; ¹ Eugene, Oregon; ² Bangor, Maine; and ³ El Paso, Texas. ⁴

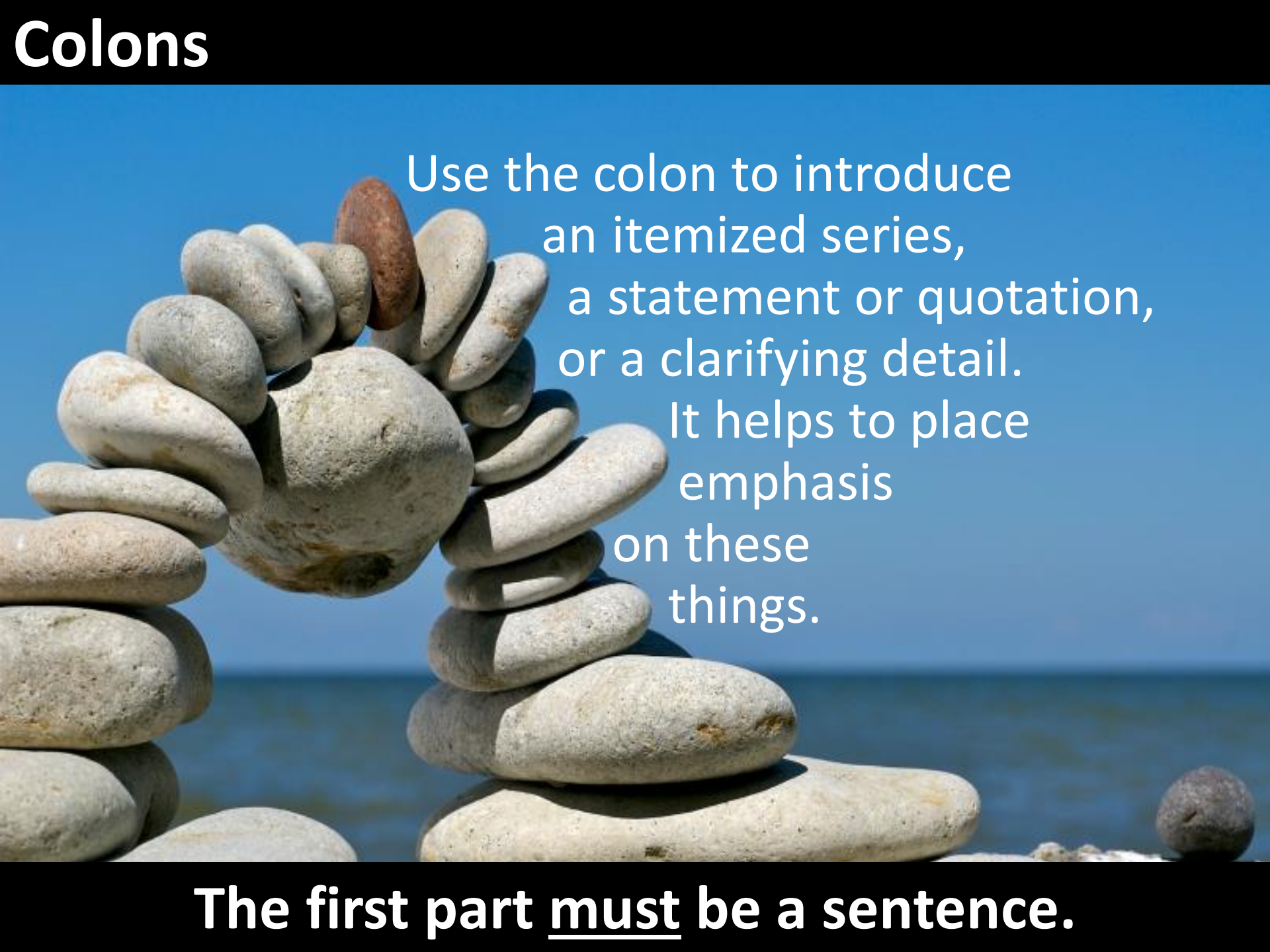
Use semicolons to

separate complete sentences (do NOT use the FANBOYS)



and separate items in a list that already contains commas.

Colons



Use the colon to introduce an itemized series, a statement or quotation, or a clarifying detail. It helps to place emphasis on these things.

The first part must be a sentence.

Itemized Series

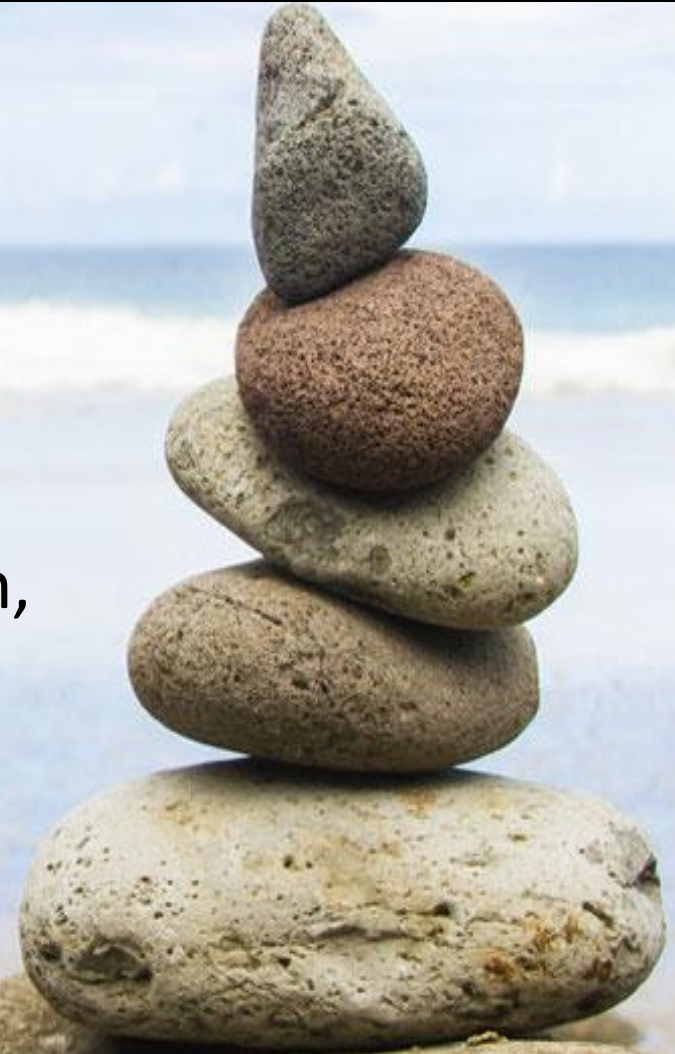
My mother taught me three things: to make my bed in the morning, to clean up the kitchen as I go, and to have a happy attitude.



Notice how the first part is a complete sentence!

Formal Statement or Quotation

At the end of the semester, the students danced and sang: “No more English 1301! Hurrah, hurrah, it’s all done!”



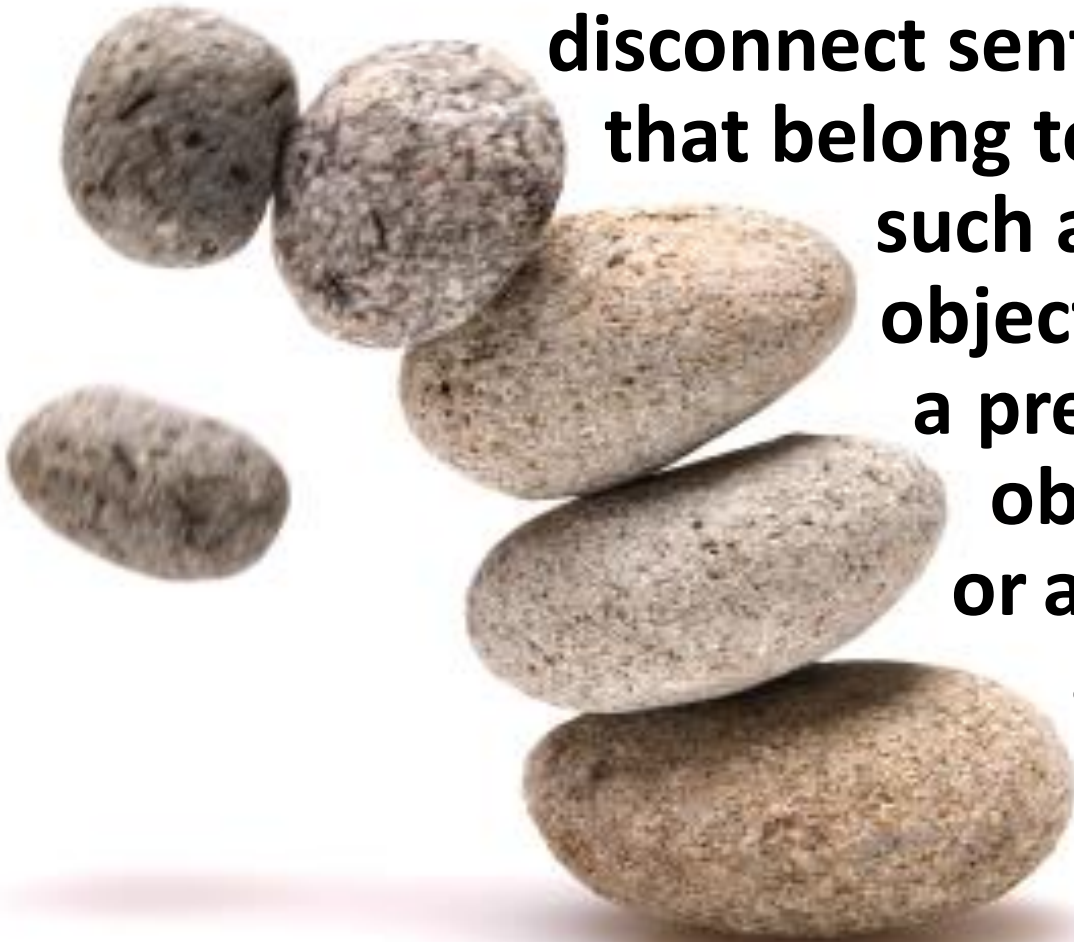
If the quotation following a colon forms a complete sentence, capitalize the first word of the sentence. If it is not a complete sentence, use lowercase for the first word.

Emphasize a Clarifying Detail or Example

In my life I have only one regret:
I never should have
started smoking.

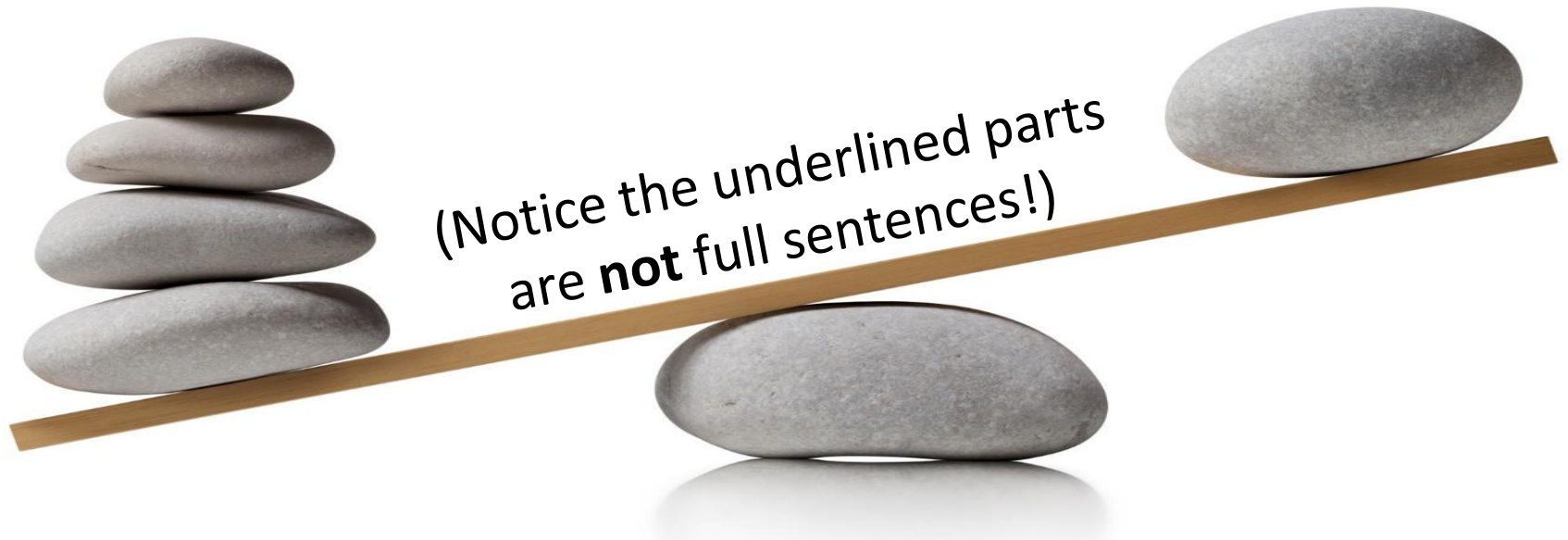


**Do not allow a colon to
disconnect sentence parts
that belong together,
such as a verb and its
object,
a preposition and its
object,
or an infinitive
and its object.**



The trainer began harping on: the receivers, the offensive linemen, the quarterback, and the second string kicker.

I like a number of fruits, such as: pineapple, dragon fruit, papaya, and mango.



The trainer began harping on the receivers, the offensive linemen, the quarterback, and the second string kicker.

I like a number of fruits, such as pineapple, dragon fruit, papaya, and mango.



Use semicolons to

- Connect two closely related sentences
- Divide between items in a series when the items already have commas



Use colons to

- Set off an itemized list (1, 2, 3...)
- Emphasize a clarifying detail
- Set off a direct quotation

**Remember this:
the part before the colon
must always be a full
sentence!**