

**ACT MINI-  
LESSON:  
COLONS, DASHES,  
HYPHENS, &  
PARALLELISM**

***ADAPTED FROM  
MANHATTAN  
PREP 5 LB ACT  
TEST PREP  
BOOK, UNC  
WRITING CENTER,  
AND PREP  
SCHOLAR,***

# RULES FOR USING COLONS

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- To announce, introduce, or direct attention to a list, a noun or noun phrase, a quotation, or an example/explanation.
- You can use a colon to connect two sentences when the second sentence summarizes, sharpens, or explains the first. Both sentences should be complete, and their content should be very closely related.

# EXAMPLES OF CORRECT COLON USE

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- My roommate gave me the things I needed most: companionship and quiet.
- Shakespeare said it best: “To thine own self be true.”
- Many graduate students discover that there is a dark side to academia: late nights, high stress, and a crippling addiction to caffeinated beverages.

# COMMON COLON MISTAKES

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- **Using a colon between a verb and its object or complement**
  - The very best peaches are: those that are grown in the great state of Georgia.
- **Using a colon between a preposition and its object**
  - My favorite cake is made of: carrots, flour, butter, eggs, and cream cheese icing.
- **Using a colon after “such as,” “including,” “especially,” and similar phrases.**
  - There are many different types of paper, including: college ruled, wide ruled, and plain copy paper.

# DASHES

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- Dashes are one of the most versatile forms of punctuation, but for the ACT you really only need to understand two of its uses:
  - marking off a non-essential clause or phrase (just like a comma)
  - introducing a list or explanation (just like a colon).
- Non-essential clauses and phrases provide information that can be removed without changing the meaning of the sentence.
- Don't mix commas and dashes in the same non-essential phrase or clause.

# DASHES EXAMPLE: WHICH IS CORRECT?

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- Allie was minding her own business when her brother, a mischievous eight-year-old—snuck up and surprised her.
- Allie was minding her own business when her brother—a mischievous eight-year-old—snuck up and surprised her.
- Allie was minding her own business when her brother, a mischievous eight-year-old, snuck up and surprised her.

# HYPHENS

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- Use a hyphen to join two or more adjectives together when they act as a single idea and come before the noun they modify
  - *a 5-page paper*
  - *a one-year-old girl*
  - *an all-too-common mistake*
- **Don't** use a hyphen when you have an adjective and an **adverb** before a noun. Adverbs can't modify nouns, so it's already clear without the hyphen.

# PARALLELISM

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- One of the most important rhetorical skills tested on the ACT is **parallelism**, which means using the same pattern of words in a sentence.
- The basic parallel structure rule is that **the things in a list should be in the same grammatical form**. If you're listing three things, the construction of that list should be *noun, noun, noun*, or *verb, verb, verb*, or *gerund, gerund, gerund*, etc. **Any inconsistency within the list is an error in parallel structure.**

# PARALLELISM IN LISTS

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- Non-parallel: Martin Luther King is admired for his courage, his dedication, and being intelligent.
- Parallel: Martin Luther King is admired for his courage, his dedication, and his intelligence.

# PARALLELISM IN PHRASES

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- Parallel structure phrase questions are slightly more complicated than list questions, but they follow the same principle.
- The parallel structure rule regarding phrases is that **the construction of a phrase on one side of a conjunction must match the construction of the phrase on the other side of the conjunction as closely as possible.**

# EXAMPLE

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The ACT English section **challenges** **students** and **frustration is found in them.**

The first item, "**challenges students**," is **VERB + NOUN** .  
The second item that follows the conjunction is "**frustration is found in them.**" That phrase's construction is **NOUN + VERB + ADJECTIVE + PREPOSITION + PRONOUN**.

# PRACTICE

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# QUESTION 1

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6. The influence of classical mythology on the naming of certain chemical elements can be seen in the names themselves: tantalum, niobium, cadmium, and mercury.

F. NO CHANGE

G. themselves

H. themselves,

J. themselves;

## QUESTION 2

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17. Dissatisfaction with standard Igbo led Achebe to use English to write *Things Fall Apart* and its less famous sequel, *No Longer at Ease*.
- A. NO CHANGE
  - B. write:
  - C. write;
  - D. write,

# QUESTION 3

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19. Among the honorees at the club's annual awards banquet, will be those who are unable to attend because of old age or illness.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. banquet; will be
- C. banquet will be
- D. banquet will be:

# QUESTION 4

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40. There has never been a period in history during which wars could have been avoided entirely and only peaceful activities pursued everywhere.

F. NO CHANGE

G. only there were peaceful activities pursued then

H. peaceful activities were pursued only at that time

J. the pursuit of only peaceful activities

# QUESTION 5

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49. In their single-minded quest for sudden wealth, these particular wildcatters have forsaken practically every other activity, driven their families and friends to near madness, and breaking local, state, and federal laws restricting drilling on public lands.
- A. NO CHANGE
  - B. they broke
  - C. even break
  - D. even broken

# QUESTION 6

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58. Cooperative enterprises are intended in fact to be cooperative—the members typically work alongside each other in some way and even share in the financial results.

Which of the following alternatives to the underlined portion would NOT be acceptable?

- F. cooperative; the members typically
- G. cooperative, the members typically
- H. cooperative. The members typically
- J. cooperative; typically, the members