



Use a colon after an independent clause (complete sentence) to introduce information that explains or amplifies (adds detail to) the clause. Use a colon to underscore the relationship between two clauses. Think of the colon as a punctuation mark that ends a sentence, like the period: do not place a colon after a verb, preposition, or any other word that would cause what appears before it to be an incomplete sentence.

1. To Introduce Information Contained in a Series (List of Items)

Do not use a colon following a verb, preposition, or *such as*, *for example*, or *including*, because doing so will create an incomplete sentence.

Incorrect: The authors under consideration are: Woolf, Conrad, Faulkner, and Judith Krantz.

Correct: The authors under consideration are Woolf, Conrad, Faulkner, and Judith Krantz.

Correct: This essay considers four authors: Woolf, Conrad, Faulkner, and Judith Krantz.

Incorrect: The garden contained many lovely flowers, including: roses, dahlias, and lilies.

Correct: The garden contained many lovely flowers, including roses, dahlias, and lilies.

Correct: The garden contained many lovely flowers: roses, dahlias, and lilies.

2. To Introduce Information Contained in a Direct Quote

Always use a colon to introduce a block quote. Lead-ins to in-text quotations usually take a comma, but a colon may be used if you are building up to a striking quote and want to emphasize it. It may require re-working your sentence.

Incorrect: Following many Warner Bros. cartoons, Porky Pig concludes with: "Th- th- th- th- th- that's all, folks!"

Correct: Following many Warner Bros. cartoons, Porky Pig concludes with, "Th- th- th- th- th- that's all, folks!"

Correct: Porky Pig's slogan concludes many Warner's Bros. cartoons: "Th- th- th- th- th- that's all, folks!"

3. To Underscore the Relationship between Two Clauses

The first clause must be an independent clause (complete sentence), but the second clause may be either independent or dependent (incomplete sentence). Using a colon connects the ideas presented in the two clauses. Do not capitalize the second clause if it is dependent. If the second clause is independent, you may choose to capitalize it or not; capitalizing it indicates that it is a new sentence.

Independent + Independent: A big problem in America pertains to money: there's not enough of it.

Independent + Dependent: A big problem in America pertains to money: although, truth be told, all countries have such problems.

4. To Separate Elements in Time Indications, Ratios, and Titles/Sub-Titles

Because these uses are mechanical, you probably haven't given them a second thought: time (3:45 p.m.); ratios (3:1); titles with sub-titles (*Robin Hood: Men in Tights*).

Reference: Fowler, H. Ramsey, and Jane E. Aaron. *The Little, Brown Handbook*. 6th ed. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1995. Stilman, Anne. *Grammatically Correct: The Writer's Essential Guide to Punctuation, Spelling, Style, Usage and Grammar*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1997.