

COLONS

Colons may be the least used punctuation mark, but colons call attention to details without taking up a lot of space or requiring a new sentence. Colons specifically tell the reader to STOP and pay attention because what follows the colon directly relates back to the sentence/s that came before.

Use colons...

- **To announce a list or quotation.**

Example: Our list of camping gear read as follows: deck of cards, marshmallows, French press coffee pot, and two large cans of bug spray.

Example: My roommate has two hobbies: eating and sleeping.

Example: Consider the words of John F. Kennedy: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

Example: In her book *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day*, Joan Bolker (1998) claims: "You can write for a very long time on any given day, but...you can't then do it again the next...and writing daily is the pattern that's best suited to finishing a dissertation" (p. 45).

- **To set off a phrase that summarizes or explains the previous sentence/s.**

Example: Laughter is good medicine: it cures the blues.

Example: Studies show that female vampire bats cluster together during the day but redistribute themselves at night in order to maintain a fluid social organization: vampire bats are remarkably social.

- **After the salutation in a formal letter.**

Example: Dear Sir or Madam:

- **To indicate hours, minutes, seconds.**

Example: The plane landed on time at 7:05 P.M., London time.

Example: He finished the relay in 17:46:14, beating his performance the previous year by a full minute.

- **Between a title and subtitle.**

Example: The title of my first book is going to be *Living in the Library: My Life as a Graduate Student*.

Example: The workshop, "Grammar and Punctuation: Unlearning Sentence-Level Errors," was widely attended and terrifically exciting thanks to the facilitator dressing up as an exclamation point!

- **Between chapters and verses of the Bible.**

Example: Song of Songs 4:15

Do not use the colon...

- **After certain words or phrases (e.g., including, such as, for example).**

Error: Communities have begun printing pamphlets such as: "Helping Your Child Enjoy Recreational Sports" and "Tempering Parent Egos during Little League Games." (the sentence would read fine without the colon; alternatively, a comma before "such as" would set off the additional information)

- **After a preposition (e.g., as, of, before, for, from, to, in, on, across, after).**

Error: She had planned to: major in political science and economics, graduate in 3.5 years, and attend law school in Washington, DC. (the sentence would read fine without the colon, or the writer could insert "do the following" before the colon in order to announce the list that follows)