

Using Colons

What is a colon?

A colon introduces material that relates to the information given before. To test the need for a colon, insert “that is” in place of the colon. If the sentence makes sense, then the colon is being used correctly. Remember, a complete sentence must come *before* a colon, but does not need to follow one.

Use colons...

⇒ **Before a list or series**

“the following” or “as follows” may come before the colon to further prepare the reader for the list or series.

Colons look like...

- *The best advice for students who are writing papers is as follows: revision, revision, revision.*

⇒ **Before a complete sentence that explains the previous sentence**

A sentence following a colon may begin with a capital or lowercase letter, but usage should be consistent.

- *When camping, it’s good to remember Murphy’s Law: If anything can go wrong, it will.*

⇒ **As a formal introduction to a final appositive**

An *appositive* is a noun or noun phrase that gives further information about the word or phrase that precedes it.

- *Though not perfect, one form of government has proven superior to all others: democracy.*

⇒ **To introduce a quote, especially if it is long or formal**

- *Henry Ford said it best: “If you think you can or think you can’t, you’re right.”*

⇒ **To separate a title from a subtitle**

- *Working Your Way Through School: A Guide to Study Skills*

Using Colons

Do NOT use colons...

⇒ **Between a verb and its object or complement**

⇒ **Between a preposition and its object**

Or before phrases like *such as*, *especially*, or *including*

Colons look like...

- *He likes to play: soccer, baseball, and tennis.*

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- *The coordinator is in charge of: registration, cabin assignments, and camp clean-up*

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