

The Colon:

A colon represents a pause for the insertion of further information, lists, expansion, or elaboration on what preceded it. Think of the colon as a gateway into the next train of thought.

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The colon often takes the place of phrases such as “that is” or “namely” because it is providing extra information.

Examples:

I wanted to go to the museum to see my favorite artist, that is, Rembrandt.

I wanted to go to the museum to see my favorite artist: Rembrandt.

Janel needed just one thing from the store, namely Italian bread.

Janel needed just one thing from the store: Italian bread.

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Use a colon to introduce a list:

Example: I enjoy the following activities: running, cycling, hiking, and skiing.

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Use a colon after a complete statement when you are introducing closely related ideas that elaborate on the preceding idea:

Example: The science experiment was a success: the researchers were able to prove that a rock is denser than water.

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Use a colon to expand on an idea:

Example: The university faculty members noticed an increase in student participation on campus: more freshman and sophomores were attending student planned activities than in previous years.

Example: Sam was caught between two worlds: he loved the excitement of the city, but he had an innate appreciation for nature and the beauty of the countryside.

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Do not use a colon right after a verb in a sentence. The colon is often used to introduce something. The verb may also be introducing; therefore, it would be redundant to use a colon right after the verb.

Example: My favorite foods include spaghetti, eggplant, and chicken divan.

You do not need a colon after include because “include” is introducing your list already.

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To Capitalize or not to capitalize?

There are some instances where you may have to capitalize the first word after your colon.

Capitalize if the sentence following your colon is a quote.

Example: In his work, *The Mysterious Stranger*, Mark Twain gives the reader a new perspective on happiness: “Sanity and happiness are an impossible combination.”

Capitalize if the statement that comes after your colon is more than one sentence.

Example: There are two reasons why the baseball team did not make it to the playoffs: First of all, they had a horrible pitching coach. Secondly, the players did not respect one another enough to work well together on the field.

The following resources were consulted in the design of this handout:

Olson, Gary. “The Colon.” *Punctuation Made Simple*. 2001. University of South Florida.
<<http://chuma.cas.usf.edu/~olson/pms/colon.html>>.

“The Colon.” *Guide to Grammar and Writing*. Capital Community College Foundation
<<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/marks/colon.htm>>.

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