

Colons

APSU Writing Center Handout

A colon (:) is a punctuation mark used to introduce, explain, or call attention to information.

Colons often signal that what follows will clarify, expand on, or illustrate what came before.

When To Use a Colon

Between two independent clauses when the second clause explains or expands on the first.

- **Example:** I had no brain tumor, no eyestrain, no high blood pressure, nothing wrong with me at all: I simply had migraine headaches.

After an independent clause to introduce a formal direct quotation.

- **Example:** Marcel Proust explained the importance of mindfulness in this way: “The true journey of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having fresh eyes.”

After an independent clause to introduce a phrase that completes or expands the idea.

- **Example:** I was finally confronted with what I had dreaded for months: the due date for the final balloon payment on my car loan.

To introduce a list, if the part before the colon is a complete sentence.

- **Example:** Three students received internships: Asa, Vanna, and Jack.

When Not to Use a Colon

Do NOT place a colon between a verb and its object or complement.

- **Incorrect Example:** The winners were: Asa, Vanna, and Jack.
- **Correct Example:** The winners were Asa, Vanna, and Jack.

Do NOT use a colon after “including,” “such as,” or similar expressions.

- **Incorrect Example:** Many vegetarians do not eat dairy such as: butter and cheese.
- **Correct Example:** Many vegetarians do not eat dairy such as butter and cheese.

References

Lester, J. D., & Lester, J. D. (2014). *The LB brief handbook* (5th ed.). Pearson.