

Colons

Handout courtesy of Angela Gulick

There are 5 main uses of a colon. If you have a situation where you have two complete sentences next to each other, you use a **semicolon** to divide them. See **Semicolons** for more information.

Use 1: Use a colon to introduce a list of items only if the list is preceded by **a complete sentence**. Be careful when using words such as the following: especially, such as, including, and for example. You only need a colon if you have a **complete sentence** that comes before such a word.

- *Incorrect:* I am a big fan of 1970s singer/songwriters, **especially:** Carole King, James Taylor, Harry Chapin, Carly Simon, Neil Young, and John Fogerty. (incorrect colon)
- *Correct:* I am a big fan of 1970s singer/songwriters, especially Carole King, James Taylor, Harry Chapin, Carly Simon, and John Fogerty. (no colon)
- *Correct:* I am a big fan of 1970s singer/songwriters, especially **the following artists:** Carole King, James Taylor, Harry Chapin, Carly Simon, and John Fogerty. (complete sentence before colon).
- *Incorrect:* Professional athletes have many responsibilities, **such as:** managing their time, listening to their teammates, and appreciating their fans. (incorrect colon)
- *Correct:* Professional athletes have many responsibilities, such as managing their time, listening to their teammates, and appreciating their fans. (no colon)
- *Correct:* Professional athletes have **the following** responsibilities: managing their time, listening to their teammates, and appreciating their fans. (complete sentence before colon)

Use 2: Use a colon in professional business correspondence at the end of your greeting if you use the person's professional title and last name. If you are on an informal, first-name basis with your reader, use a comma instead:

- Professional Greeting: Dear Dr. Penne: Dear Captain Henderson: Dear Father Ryan:
- Informal Greeting: Dear Amy, Dear Phillip, Dear Shawn,

Use 3: Use a colon when writing out a specific time: 4:35 p.m. 6:10 a.m. 11:00 a.m.

Use 4: Use a colon to introduce a direct quotation only if you have **a complete sentence that precedes the quotation**. Here are two examples:

- In "Pun Work Helps English Learners Get the Joke," Kristin Lems states the following:
- David Sedaris really knew what he was talking about when he spoke about the unfortunate consequences of snooping: "If you read someone else's diary, you get what you deserve."

Use 5: Use a colon when presenting a document or program title that has a subtitle:

- *Explorabook: A Kid's Science Museum in a Book*
- *What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry*