

## COLONS

### What are colons?

- A colon ( : ) is a punctuation mark that signals readers to a close connection between the statement before the colon and what follows after it. Colons are used to show a significant division in a sentence. They are more powerful than a comma.

### How are colons used?

- Colons can be used to introduce a list that categorizes or explains.
  - *Correct: Our children have a bedtime routine: brush teeth, read a book, and go to bed.*
  - *Correct: Two topics will be mentioned: the new training and the revised PowerPoint.*
- Colons can be used to show emphasis or importance.
  - *Correct: Only one thing stands between me and graduation: my final paper.*
- Colons can be used in business letters or formal letters.
  - *Correct: Dear Sir:*
    - *A colon always follows the greeting in business letters or formal letters.*
  - *Correct: Dear Rebecca:*
    - *In business letters or formal letters, a colon follows the recipients' name even if you are addressing them by their first name.*
- Colons can also be used to separate titles from subtitles.
  - *Correct: Data Entry: How to Enter Data into Microsoft Excel*
- Colons can also be used to indicate clock time and to separate numbers.
  - *Clock time: 8:30 A.M.*
- Colons can also be used in references or citations.
  - *Psalms: 14:22*
  - *Footnote: Author, Title of Book, Publisher City: Publisher. Year Published, page.*

### A rule to follow when using colons:

- Colons ( : ) are placed outside of quotation marks ( “ ” )
  - *Correct: Jessie crossed the street and shouted: “Has anyone seen a brown dog? I cannot seem to find my dog anywhere.”*

### Examples of properly & improperly placed colons:

- Colons have to be placed properly. Below are two examples of what to avoid when using colons.
  - *Correct: I need four items from the store: eggs, bread, cheese, and milk.*
    - *This is correct because the verb is not separated from its objects.*
    - *Also correct because it introduces a list.*
  - *Incorrect: Four items that I need from the store are: eggs, bread, cheese, and milk.*
    - *This is incorrect because the verb should **not** be separated from its objects.*

- Correct: The train will be making several stops: New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine.
  - This is correct because the verb is not separated from its objects.
  - Also correct because it introduces a list.
- Incorrect: I might take the train to; New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine.
  - This is incorrect because a preposition should not be separated from its objects.

## References

Alred GJ, Brusaw CT, Oliu WE. *Handbook of Technical Writing*. New York: St. Martin's Press; 2007.

St. Kate's Library Guide. Citing Sources using AMA Citation Style. St. Catherine University.  
<http://libguides.stkate.edu/>. Published April 2011. Accessed September 17, 2012.

Health Sciences Library. AMA Style Guide. University of Washington.  
<http://libguides.hsl.washington.edu/ama>. Published December 12, 2011. Accessed September 17, 2012.

Driscoll D, Brizee A. Commas: Quick Rules. Purdue Online Writing Lab. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>.  
Published April 2011. Accessed September 17, 2012.

Sousa M, Driscoll DL. Brief Overview of Punctuation. Purdue Online Writing Lab.  
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>. Published April 2011. Accessed September 17, 2012.