

PURPOSE

A colon [:] introduces and draws attention to information that will expand or clarify the preceding independent clause (a clause that can stand on its own as a sentence). This information could be another clause, a list, an appositive, or a quotation. *Remember, a colon must be preceded by an independent clause.*

STYLE

Typically, writers place only one space after a colon and do not capitalize the first word of a complete sentence following the colon. These are stylistic choices, however; just be consistent throughout your entire document.

RULES AND EXAMPLES

USE A COLON TO INTRODUCE A LIST.

The adventurers faced several misfortunes on their quest: swarms of killer bees, poison ivy, and wild animals.

USE A COLON BEFORE AN APPOSITIVE.

Guinevere loved two men: Lancelot and Arthur.

USE A COLON BEFORE A QUOTATION.

The battered knight raised his sword and bellowed the unforgettable order: "Begone, foul beast!"

USE A COLON BETWEEN INDEPENDENT CLAUSES IF THE SECOND SUMMARIZES OR EXPLAINS THE FIRST.

The tantalizing treasure glinted in the moonlight: you could loot it, but you'd be cursed for eternity.

IF A COLON COMES AFTER A QUOTATION, THE COLON BELONGS AFTER THE CLOSING QUOTATION MARKS.

In "Morte d'Arthur," we see only two knights have made it to the "barren land": Sir Bedivere and King Arthur.

COMMON COLON MISTAKES

In the three incorrect examples below, note that the colon is not preceded by an independent clause; simply removing the colons will make the sentences correct.

DON'T USE A COLON AFTER A PREPOSITION.

The adventurers' quest was plagued by: swarms of killer bees, poison ivy, and wild animals.

DON'T USE A COLON BETWEEN A VERB AND ITS OBJECT OR COMPLEMENT.

Five Knights of the Round Table are: Arthur, Lancelot, Gawain, Percival, and Tristan.

DON'T USE A COLON AFTER WORDS LIKE INCLUDING, FOR EXAMPLE, OR SUCH AS.

My paper is on Arthurian characters with mystical powers such as: Sir Kay, Merlin, and Morgan Le Fay.

OTHER COLONS USES

Letter salutation

Dear Sir or Madam:

Hours and minutes

7:00 a.m.

Proportions

The elves outnumbered the dwarves 5:1.

Title and Subtitle

Experience Points and Gold: A Beginner's Guide to Questing

Bibliographic information

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Chapter and verse

Exodus 20:2