

THE COLON

Name:

Rule 1. The most common use of a colon is to introduce an item or a list of items—especially after a signal word or phrase such as *these, as follows, or the following*.

Examples:

- A) This course will cover these topics: stupidity, prejudice, and ignorance.
- B) The experiment requires the following equipment: test tubes, hamsters, alligators, unsuspecting senior citizens, and Mr. Robel.

THE COLON TEST – To see if a colon is needed, do this test:

The words that come before the colon ...

(1) should introduce *what comes after* the colon and

(2) should be a grammatically complete sentence that *can stand alone*.

Examples: Do the following two sentences pass “the colon test”? Judge for yourself.

- C) Your application will be incomplete without two additional things: your fifty-page personal essay and a check for one million dollars.
- D) There is one subject everyone loves to hate: grammar!

NOTE: Related to this main rule are the following two subordinate rules:

Use a colon to formally introduce a quotation, a sentence, or a question.

- E) Wallace Stevens once made an interesting observation about poetry: “The poet is the priest of the invisible.”

Use a colon to emphasize a single word, a phrase, a clause, or a sentence that explains or adds impact to the main clause.

- F) There have been many talented rappers, but one rapper is the greatest: Robe-Dawg.

Rule 2. Use a colon after the salutation of a business letter or a formal email.

Dear Judge Parker:

Dear Governor Brown:

Dear Commander Robel:

Rule 3. Use a colon to distinguish between a title and a subtitle, volume and page, and chapter and verse in literature.

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Psalm 23:1-6

Rule 4. When SHOULDN’T you use a colon?

NEVER place a colon immediately after a preposition or after a verb.

Also, **NEVER** place a colon between a verb or preposition and its object.

Incorrect: Dad watches TV shows about: art, music, and rock climbing.

Correct: Dad watches TV shows about art, music, and rock climbing.

OR

Dad watches TV shows about his favorite subjects: art, music, and rock climbing.

OVER→

Rule 4 – Continued

Incorrect: Maria has: a snowmobile, an ATV, and a canoe.

Correct: Maria has a snowmobile, an ATV, and a canoe.

OR

Maria has plenty of toys: a snowmobile, an ATV, and a canoe.

Exercise – In the following sentences, insert colons wherever necessary.

(Note: One of the sentences does not need a colons.)

1. Please give me the following objects your teddy bear, your purple boots, your identity, and your soul.

2. Bring these three things with you to the party shrimp dip, a pointy hat, and a mouse trap.

3. Dear Sir or Madam

I would like to order two items a Buffalo Bronzer™ and a leather nose protector.

4. My favorite types of music are rap-country, punk-country, and opera-country. What are yours?

5. Gandhi said something very wise about revenge “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.”

6. I will never forget the most exciting and heroic moment in Carmel High history when Mr. Robel saved the entire school from a burning soda machine.

7. At 11 00 PM tonight, I am watching *Star Wars Episode 5 The Empire Strikes Back*.

8. There is one thing you probably need to know about haggis it is a pudding containing sheep’s heart, liver and lungs; minced with onion, oatmeal, spices, and salt; and traditionally encased in the animal’s stomach.