

Understanding Colons

Many people tend to be confused about the use of colons, but you'll soon see that their function is quite simple! A colon (:) introduces an element or a series of elements, drawing attention to the information that follows. It often gives the impression of "as follows," "which is/are," or "thus." Think of it as a flashing sign pointing toward what comes next.

Colons Introducing a List

Example:

- There are three types of music we can listen to: pop, rock, and jazz.

The colon here tells us that we're about to learn the three types of music we can choose from. You can also read it this way:

■ There are three types of music we can listen to (and they are): pop, rock, and jazz. Colons are often used with lists, but they can also be used to signal clarification or elaboration. Example:

- We have two options here: stay and fight or run like the wind.

Alternate reading:

■ We have two options here (and they are as follows): stay and fight or run like the wind. Colons Introducing Quotations

Colons can also introduce a quotation, especially when the quote is formally introduced or emphasized.

Example:

- He ended with the immortal words of Neil Young: "Rock and roll can never die."

Colons Separating Independent Clauses

A colon can also be used to separate two independent clauses when the second clause directly explains or expands on the first. It's important that the second clause is clearly and closely related — not just vaguely connected.

You can also use a period or semicolon between two independent-yet-related clauses. Keep in mind:

- The period is the strongest break.

- The colon is a bit softer than a period.
- The semicolon is the softest of the three.

Understanding Colons

Examples:

- A dolphin is not a fish: it is a warm-blooded mammal.
- The research is conclusive: climate change is a reality.

Misuse of Colons

While colons are useful, they should never do the following:

- Separate a verb from its object or complement
- Separate a preposition from its object
- Separate a subject from its predicate

Here are some incorrect examples — followed by corrected versions. Incorrect:

■ The three types of music to choose from are: pop, rock, and jazz. This is incorrect because the colon separates the verb are from its subject complements. Correct:

- The three types of music to choose from are pop, rock, and jazz.

Incorrect:

■ When I graduate, I want to go to: South Korea, Japan, and France. This incorrectly separates the preposition from its objects.

Correct:

- When I graduate, I want to go to South Korea, Japan, and France.

COLONS

A colon (:) introduces an element or series of elements to bring attention to the information that preceded the colon. We all know that a semicolon (;) does the job of joining two independent clauses to signal the close connection that lies between them. A colon has the job of directing you towards the information that is following behind it. Think of a colon like a big flashing sign that points to the information that is following it. When a colon appears in a sentence, it will usually give the impression of “as follows,” “which is/are,” or “thus.”

Why don't we take a look at a sample provided to us below?

-There are three types of music we can listen to: pop, rock, and jazz.

The colon in this sentence tells us that we are about to learn the three types of music we may choose from. You could also read this sentence in an alternative way, such as the example below.

-There are three types of music we can listen to (and they are): pop, rock, and jazz.

Colons are often used with lists, but they can also be used to further signal clarification when needed.

-We have two options here: stay and fight, or run like the wind.

You could also read this like the example below.

-We have two options here (and they are as follows): stay and fight, or run like the wind.

Colons can also introduce a quotation.

-He ended with the immortal words of Neil Young: “Rock and roll can never die.”

Colons Separating Independent Clauses

A colon can be used to separate two independent clauses when...

- 1.) The second clause is directly related to the first. **(Keep in mind that it is NOT just VAGUELY related!)**

- 2.) When the emphasis is on the second sentence. (You can also use a period or semicolon between two independent-yet-related clauses. Make sure that you keep in mind that the colon is a little softer than the period, but a little harder than the semicolon.)

Why don't we take a look at some examples below?

-A dolphin is not a fish: it is a warm-blooded mammal.

-The research is conclusive: climate change is a reality.

Misuse of Colons

Remember that a colon should NEVER do ANY of the following: separate a noun and its verb, a verb and its object or subject complement, a preposition and its object, or a subject and its predicate.

Below is an example of one of our earlier sentences that has been written incorrectly.

-The three types of music to choose from are: pop, rock, and jazz.

The above sentence is incorrect because putting the colon here separates the verb *are* from its subject complements.

-When I graduate, I want to go to: South Korea, Japan, and France.

The colon should be removed in this sample sentence because it is separating the preposition *to* from its objects.

To write this sentence correctly, we should remove the colon from it.

-When I graduate, I want to go to South Korea, Japan, and France.