



There is only one major rule to remember when using colons: colons must come after complete sentences and come before something you wish to emphasize, such as lists, characteristics, or quotations.

Example:

I have three favorite things: video games, movies, and books.

If you use a colon after a sequence that cannot stand by itself, you have used a colon incorrectly. The following example is wrong:

For example: red, white, and blue.

Introducing a List

You can use a colon to introduce a list of items. It is common (but not required), to use a phrase such as “the following” somewhere before the colon.

Example:

The recipe states that the following items are optional: garlic, chopped onions, and salt.

Colons are not used after the following terms: *such as*, *including*, or *for example*.

Restating Something

Sometimes you will want to mention something (such as a characteristic, item, event, etc.) in vague terms and then restate it in more solid terms for emphasis or effect.

Example:

I look for two traits in employees: intelligence and determination.

Introducing a Quote

There are a couple of different ways to introduce a quotation. One of the most common is to use a phrase such as “She said” followed by a comma and then the quoted material. A colon, however, is a more appropriate choice if you use a complete sentence to set up the quotation.

Example:

I'll never forget my grandmother's advice: “Learn to forgive others and others will learn to forgive you.”