

The Colon

Colons can be used after independent clauses to direct the readers' attention to a list, an appositive, or a quotation. It signals to the reader that there may be more details, or an explanation, to come.

A List

The following people will be on vacation next week: Susan, Clyde, Jenny, and Mark.

The following items are now on sale: bread, cheese, eggs, and milk.

An Appositive

My sister has two children: Christopher and Steven.

A Quotation

Consider the words of Queen Elizabeth II: "We are not amused."

For other ways of introducing quotations, see the Quotations page of this website.

We may also use a colon between independent clauses if the second clause summarizes or explains the first clause:

My love for you is real: it is completely genuine.

Conventional Colons

Always use a colon after the salutation in a business letter, to show hours and minutes, to show proportions, between a title and a subtitle, and to separate city and publisher in bibliographic entries.

Dear Sir:

Dear Madam:

To whom it may concern:

12:45 p.m.

6:37 a.m.

The ratio of boys to girls is 6:3.

The Pursuit That Is Not So Trivial: The Power Of The Ungraded Quiz

Boston: Bedford, 2012.

Note: a colon is also used in biblical references between chapter and verse, e.g. Luke 3:25, Genesis 1:25.