



## Colons (:)

The following information is adapted from Strunk & White's *Elements of Style*.

"A colon tells the reader that what follows is closely related to the preceding clause. The colon has more effect than the comma, less power to separate than the semicolon, and more formality than the dash. It usually follows an independent clause and should not separate a verb from its complement or a preposition from its objective" (7-8).

A colon should be used after an independent clause to introduce a list of specifics, an appositive that re-names something or someone, an amplification or interpretation, or an illustrative quotation. It is also used in various functions of form.

### A List of Specifics:

- × *Living in the apartments, I eat: sandwiches, fish sticks, and chocolate chips.*
- ✓ *Living in the apartments, I eat the following: sandwiches, fish sticks, and chocolate chips.*
- × *Living in the apartments, the entrées I eat are: sandwiches, fish sticks, and chocolate chips.*
- ✓ *Living in the apartments, I eat these entrées: sandwiches, fish sticks, and chocolate chips.*

### An Appositive or Re-naming:

Ex: *There's only one toy I've kept from childhood: my doll, Babette.*

### An Amplification or Interpretation:

Ex: *Desserts can add to a healthy diet: fresh fruits, yogurt, and nuts have nutritional qualities.*

### An Illustrative Quotation:

Ex: *Every morning when I wake up for my 8:00 class, I remember a quote by T.S. Eliot: "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons."*

### Functions of Form:

The colon follows the salutation of a formal letter, separates hour from minute in time notation, separates the title from a subtitle, and separates the Bible chapter from its verse (8).

Ex:  
To whom it may concern:  
My evening class starts at 8:15 pm.  
The song is 00:3:56 long.  
*The Diary: A Secret Treasure*  
Psalm 23:1

MLA citation: Strunk, William, and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 3rd ed. New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1979. Print.