So far we’ve used strings as hash keys, but in Rails it is much more common to use *symbols* instead. Symbols look kind of like strings, but prefixed with a colon instead of surrounded by quotes. For example, **:name** is a symbol. You can think of symbols as basically strings without all the extra baggage:

(As a result of having less baggage, symbols are easier to compare to each other; strings need to be compared character by character, while symbols can be compared all in one go. This makes them ideal for use as hash keys)

In terms of symbols as hash keys, we can define a **user** hash as follows:

**>>** user = { :name => "Michael Hartl", :email => "michael@example.com" }

=> {:name=>"Michael Hartl", :email=>"michael@example.com"}

**>>** user[:name] *# Access the value corresponding to :name.*

=> "Michael Hartl"

**>>** user[:password] *# Access the value of an undefined key.*

=> nil