

Punctuation – Colon

Punctuation – The Colon

A colon looks like a full stop on top of a full stop (:).

It generally introduces a list or series of items.

It can be used to combine two independent clauses if the second clause summarises or clarifies the first.

A colon separates hours from minutes when writing the time.

They also show ratios or proportions.

Colons are used after warnings.

They are used when replying and forwarding emails.

Colons are used in dialogue scripts.

Capitalisation following a colon needs to be explained.

Colon – Examples #1

A colon generally introduces a list or series of items.

➤ “Your homework is as follows: (1) task one; (2) task two; (3) task three.”

➤ There are a few tasks we need to complete before the next meeting:

- task one;
- task two; and
- task three.

Colon – Examples #2

A colon can be used to combine two independent clauses if the second clause summarises or clarifies the first.

- It rained all day: I am soaked.
- I like all sorts of music: rock, metal, jazz, classical ...

The colon can replace words or phrases such as ‘including’, ‘for example’

- I like all sorts of music, for example rock, metal, jazz, classical ...

Colon – Examples #3

A colon separates hours from minutes when writing the time.

- 10:15 = a quarter past 10
- 21:30 = half past 9
- 07:55 = five minutes to 8

Colon – Examples #4

Colons also show ratios, proportions and gambling odds.

- Older monitors had an aspect ratio of 4:3.
- The recipe has fat, sugar and flour proportions of 1:1:3.
- An outsider won the race and the odds were 20:1!

Colon – Examples #5

Colons are used after warnings.

- **Warning:** Poisonous substance
- **Caution:** Slippery when wet
- **Danger:** Deep water

Colon – Examples #6

Colons are used when replying and forwarding emails.

- RE: Enquiry with reference number 123456
- Re: Enquiry with reference number 123456
- FW: Enquiry with reference number 123456
- fwd: Enquiry with reference number 123456

Colon – Examples #7

Colons are used in dialogue scripts.

BOB: I was sick yesterday. Did I miss anything interesting?

SUZI: I'm sorry to hear that. The meeting was boring.

PAUL: Yeah, you did the right thing staying away.

Colon – Examples #8

Capitalisation following a colon needs to be explained.

- Some say that the word after the colon should be lower case.
- Others say it must be upper case.
- Others give situations for when to use upper or lower case.

There are no hard-and-fast rules for this.

If in doubt, refer to a company style guide and be consistent.