

## CHAPTER 25

## Colons

**25a** What are the uses of a colon?

A **colon** is a full stop that draws attention to the words that follow. It can be placed only at the end of an **INDEPENDENT CLAUSE**. A colon introduces a list, an **APPOSITIVE**, or a **QUOTATION**.

**25b** When can a colon introduce a list, an appositive, or a quotation?

When a complete sentence—that is, an **INDEPENDENT CLAUSE**—introduces a list, an **APPOSITIVE**, or a **QUOTATION**, place a colon before the words being introduced. These words don't have to form an independent clause themselves, but a complete sentence before the colon is essential. Box 25-1 shows this pattern for using a colon.

**BOX 25-1** PATTERN

## Colon sentence I

- Independent clause: list.
- Independent clause: appositive.
- Independent clause: “Quoted words.”

**Introducing listed items**

When a complete sentence introduces a list, a colon is required, as demonstrated in the following example.

**If you really want to lose weight, you must do three things:** eat smaller portions, exercise, and drink lots of water. [The required independent clause comes before the listed items, so a colon is correct.]

When the lead-in words at the end of an independent clause are *such as*, *including*, *like*, or *consists of*, never use a colon. In contrast, if the lead-in words at the end of an independent clause are *the following* or *as follows*, do use a colon.

**The students demanded improvements such as** an expanded menu in the cafeteria, improved janitorial services, and more up-to-date textbooks.

## When can I use a colon between two independent clauses?

**The students demanded *the following*:** an expanded menu in the cafeteria, improved janitorial services, and more up-to-date textbooks.

### Introducing appositives

An **APPOSITIVE** is a word or words that rename a **NOUN** or **PRONOUN**. When an appositive is introduced by an independent clause, use a colon.

**Only cats would likely approve of one old-fashioned remedy for cuts:** a lotion of catnip, butter, and sugar. [The required independent clause comes before the appositive: *a lotion of catnip, butter, and sugar* renames *old-fashioned remedy*.]

### Introducing quotations


When an independent clause introduces a quotation, use a colon after it. (If the words introducing a quotation don't form an independent clause, use a comma.)

**The little boy in *E.T.* did say something neat:** "How do you explain school to a higher intelligence?" [The required independent clause comes before the quotation.]

—George F. Will, "Well, I Don't Love You, E.T."

## 25c When can I use a colon between two independent clauses?

When a second **INDEPENDENT CLAUSE** explains or summarizes a first independent clause, you can use a colon to separate them. Box 25-2 shows this pattern for using a colon.

 **ALERT:** You can choose to use a capital letter or a lowercase letter for the first word of an independent clause that follows a colon. Whichever you choose, be consistent within a piece of writing. We use a capital letter in this handbook.

We will never forget the first time we made dinner together: **He** got stomach poisoning and was too sick to go to work for four days.

—Lisa Baladendrum, student 

### BOX 25-2 PATTERN



#### Colon sentence II

- Independent clause: Independent clause that explains or summarizes the prior independent clause.

## 25d What standard formats require a colon?

A variety of standard formats in American English require a colon. Also, colons are used in many DOCUMENTATION STYLES, as shown in Chapters 33 and 34.

### TITLE AND SUBTITLE

*A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*

### HOURS, MINUTES, AND SECONDS

The plane took off at 7:15 p.m.

The track star passed the halfway point at 1:23.02.



**ALERT:** In the military, hours and minutes are written without colons and with four digits on a 24-hour clock: *The staff meeting originally scheduled for Tuesday at 0930 will be held Tuesday at 1430 instead.*

### REFERENCES TO BIBLE CHAPTERS AND VERSES

Psalms 23:1–3

Luke 3:13

### MEMOS

To: Dean Kristen Olivero

From: Professor Daniel Black

Re: Student Work-Study Program

### SALUTATION IN A BUSINESS LETTER

Dear Dr. Jewell:

## 25e When is a colon wrong?

### Independent clauses

A colon can introduce a list, an APPOSITIVE, or a QUOTATION, but only when an INDEPENDENT CLAUSE does the introducing. Similarly, a colon can be used between two independent clauses when the second summarizes or explains the first. In following these rules, be sure that you're dealing with independent clauses, not other word groups.

**NO** The cook bought: eggs, milk, cheese, and bread. [*The cook bought* isn't an independent clause.]

**YES** The cook bought eggs, milk, cheese, and bread.

Never use a colon to separate a PHRASE or DEPENDENT CLAUSE from an independent clause. Otherwise, you'll create the error known as a SENTENCE FRAGMENT.

- NO** Day after day: the drought dragged on. [*Day after day* is a phrase, not an independent clause.]
- YES** Day after day, the drought dragged on.
- NO** After the drought ended: the farmers celebrated. [*After the drought ended* is a dependent clause, not an independent clause.]
- YES** After the drought ended, the farmers celebrated.

### Lead-in words

Never use a colon after the lead-in words *such as*, *including*, *like*, and *consists of*.

- NO** The health board discussed many problems **such as**: poor water quality, aging sewage treatment systems, and the lack of alternate water supplies. [A colon is incorrect after *such as*.]
- YES** The health board discussed poor water quality, aging sewage treatment systems, and the lack of alternate water supplies. [*Such as* is dropped and the sentence slightly revised.]
- YES** The health board discussed many problems, **such as** poor water quality, an aging sewage treatment system, and the lack of alternate water supplies. [Comma before *such as* tells the reader that the list coming up is nonrestrictive (nonessential)—it illustrates *problems*.]
- YES** The health board discussed many problems: poor water quality, aging sewage treatment systems, and the lack of alternate water supplies. [If *such as* is dropped, a colon after the independent clause is correct.]

**EXERCISE 25-1** Insert colons where needed and delete any not needed. If a sentence is correct, explain why. For help, consult all sections of this chapter.

1. People who work the night shift are typically deprived of essential sleep, an average of nine hours a week.
2. The Iroquois of the Great Lakes region lived in fortified villages and cultivated: corn, beans, and squash.
3. Five nations originally formed the Iroquois Confederacy: the Mohawk, the Oneida, the Onondaga, the Cayuga, and the Seneca.
4. Shouting: "Come back!" Adam watched the vehicle speed down the highway.
5. However: the "runner's high" soon disappears.
6. Two new nations were born on the same day in 1947, India and Pakistan achieved their independence from Britain at midnight on August 15.
7. Only a hurricane could have kept Lisa from meeting Nathaniel at 800 p.m.; unfortunately, that night a hurricane hit.

8. George's interests were typical of a sixteen-year-old, cars, music videos, and dating.
9. Like many people who have never learned to read or write, the woman who told her life story in *Aman; The Story of a Somali Girl* was able to remember an astonishing number of events in precise detail.
10. The Greek philosopher Socrates took these words as his motto, "The unexamined life is not worth living."

## CHAPTER 26

# Apostrophes

### 26a What is the role of the apostrophe?

The **apostrophe** plays four roles in writing: It creates the POSSESSIVE CASE of NOUNS, forms the possessive case of INDEFINITE PRONOUNS, stands for one or more omitted letters in a word (a CONTRACTION), and can help form plurals of letters and numerals.

In contrast, here are two roles the apostrophe doesn't play: It doesn't belong with plurals of nouns, and it doesn't form the plural of PERSONAL PRONOUNS in the possessive case.

### 26b How do I use an apostrophe to show a possessive noun?

An apostrophe works with a NOUN to form the POSSESSIVE CASE, which shows ownership or a close relationship.

OWNERSHIP	The <b>writer's</b> pen ran out of ink.
CLOSE RELATIONSHIP	The <b>novel's</b> plot is complicated.

Possession in nouns can be communicated in two ways: by a PHRASE starting with *of* (*comments of the instructor; comments of Professor Furman*) or by an apostrophe and the letter *s* (*the instructor's comments; Professor Furman's comments*). Here's a list of specific rules governing usage of 's.

- **Add 's to nouns not ending in s:**

She felt a **parent's** joy. [*Parent* is a singular noun not ending in *s*.]  
They care about their **children's** education. [*Children* is a plural noun not ending in *s*.]