THE COLON

The colon (:) is a punctuation mark that signals the reader to anticipate what follows—a single word, a phrase, a sentence, or even an entire paragraph. Hence, a colon usually follows words that either state or imply "as follows" or "the following." The colon, which is usually reserved for formal writing, has three common uses.

1. **Colons are commonly used to introduce formal lists.**
   Examples:

   The morning schedule is as follows: breakfast at eight, calisthenics at nine, and class from ten till twelve.

   These are my favorite foods: steak, chocolate, iced cream, shrimp, and french fries.

   The utility cited four reasons for the power failure: bad weather, poor technology, human error, and bad luck.

   I have three favorite colors: red, blue, and green.

2. **You can also use a colon to prepare the reader for an explanation, an example, or a restatement of what you have just written.** Examples:

   He has one love in his life: money.

   The government has a major role in inflation: spending money it doesn't have.

   The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare is a case in point: This bureaucracy spends more money annually than any government in the world except Russia.

3. **A colon may also introduce quotations, particularly when the quoted material amplifies or explains the sentence that introduced it, or when the quote is longer than one sentence. The first letter of a quote introduced by a colon should be capitalized.** Examples:

   Osgood's summation is accurate: "This is baseball's third strike; perhaps the fans will call baseball `out,' and turn to soccer for entertainment.

***DO NOT ALLOW COLONS TO SEPARATE VERBS FROM COMPLEMENTS OR PREPOSITIONS FROM OBJECTS***

***DO NOT USE A COLON AFTER SUCH AS, INCLUDING OR FOR EXAMPLE***

***CONVENTIONAL USES: Use a colon after the salutation in a formal letter, to indicate hours and minutes, to show proportions, between a title and subtitle, and to separate city and publisher in bibliographic entries.***