Six Colon Rules

The colon is a mark of introduction; it may introduce a list of items, an explanation, or introduce a clause that reflects something that is in the clause preceding the colon.

1. Use a colon to introduce a short quotation that immediately follows an independent clause.

    Example: Epictetus encouraged individuality in one of his writings: "As bad performers cannot sing alone, but in a chorus, so some persons cannot walk alone."

2. Use a colon to introduce a long quotation that is set off from the body of the paper. Notice that such quotations are often indented and that the quotation marks and unnecessary when the quotation stands alone. This is also called a block quote.

    Example: Epictetus devoted his fourteenth chapter to a discussion of individualism. This is his opening paragraph:

    > As bad performers cannot sing alone, but in a chorus, so some persons cannot walk alone. If you are anything, walk alone, talk by yourself, and do not skulk in the chorus. Laugh a little at yourself; look about you; stir yourself that you may know what you are.

Note: The colon is **not used** when the introductory material is necessary to the form of the sentence.

    Example: Epictetus encouraged individuality when he said, "As bad performers cannot sing alone…"

3. Use a colon to introduce a list when an independent clause precedes the colon.

    Example: The recipe calls for a variety of fish: sardines, anchovies, halibut, and herring.

4. Use a colon to introduce a list after as follows or the following.

    Example: The recipe calls for the following: sardines, anchovies, halibut, and herring.

5. Use a colon to introduce an explanation (sometimes expressed as a series of steps or events)

   Example: You will need to bring the two essentials for the trip: a sleeping bag that is adequate for desert nights and a flashlight with extra batteries.

6. Use the colon between two independent clauses when the second clause reflects all or part of the first clause through illustration, rewording, or explanation.

   Example: Accommodations in San Miguel are remarkably inexpensive: two of us shared a room with full board for three dollars a day.

Do Not

1. Do not use a colon to introduce a list after *such as*…
2. Do not place a colon between a verb and the rest of the sentence.
3. Do not place a colon between a proposition and its object(s).