Colons

WHAT IS A COLON?

A colon (:) is a punctuation mark that is used to introduce information that comes after an independent clause such as examples, another closely-related independent clause, explanatory material, quotations, or series.

Colon Usage

1. Explanatory Material

A colon is used to introduce explanatory material which explains, exemplifies, or summarizes such as examples and *appositives*.

I know the best way to quench one's thirst: water.

2. Independent Clauses

A colon is used to separate two independent clauses when the second independent clause renames or provides more information for the first one.

Studies show that global warming continues to have harmful effects on our environment: more ice caps are melting as temperatures continue to increase.

3. Quotations

A colon can also be used to introduce a quotation (usually a long prose passage) if it is preceded by a complete sentence (*independent clause*).
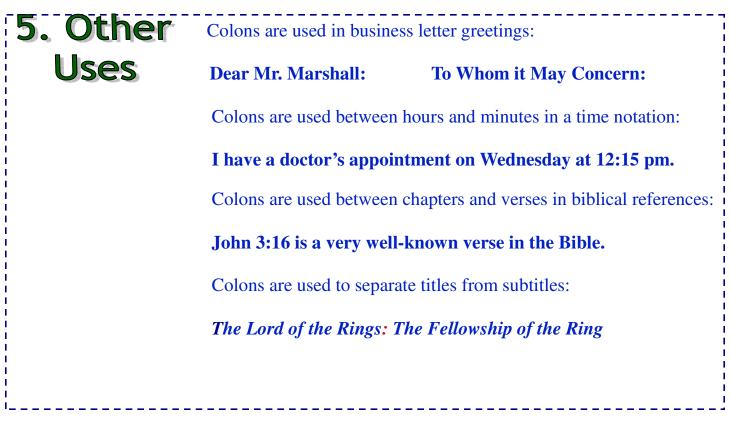
In the 2007 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush recognizes the health care needs of so many Americans: "A future of hope and opportunity requires that all our citizens have affordable and available health care."

4. Lists

Colons can be used to introduce a series or list when preceded by a complete sentence (*independent clause*). A series or list occurs when two or more items are listed in a sentence.

I am taking several classes next semester: Literature I, Western Civilization 2, Art Appreciation, Introduction to Psychology, and Microeconomics.

There were several things that Jamie had to pick up at the grocery store today: milk, eggs, meat, and green beans.

5. Other Uses

Colons are used in business letter greetings:

Dear Mr. Marshall: To Whom it May Concern:

Colons are used between hours and minutes in a time notation:

I have a doctor's appointment on Wednesday at 12:15 pm.

Colons are used between chapters and verses in biblical references:

John 3:16 is a very well-known verse in the Bible.

Colons are used to separate titles from subtitles:

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring