

Colon Use

Writers often confuse the colon with the semicolon, but their uses are entirely different.

When to Use a Colon

The colon focuses the reader's attention on what is to follow, and as a result, you should use it to introduce a list, a summation, or an idea that somehow completes the introductory idea. You may use the colon in this way, however, only after an **independent** clause:

- He visited three cities during his stay in the Maritimes: Halifax, Saint John and Moncton.
- Their lobbying efforts were ultimately useless: the bill was soundly defeated.
- My mother gave me one good piece of advice: to avoid wasting time and energy worrying about things I cannot change.

When Not to Use a Colon

You should not place a colon between a verb and its object or subject complement, or between a preposition and its object:

[**WRONG**] His neighbor lent him: a tent, a wooden canoe, and a slightly battered Coleman stove. (colon between verb and objects)

[**RIGHT**] His neighbor lent him a tent, a wooden canoe, and a slightly battered Coleman stove.

[**WRONG**] Her three goals are: to improve her public speaking skills, to increase her self-confidence and to sharpen her sales techniques. (colon between verb and subject complement)

[**RIGHT**] Her three goals are to improve her public speaking skills, to increase her self-confidence and to sharpen her sales techniques.

[**WRONG**] We traveled to: London, Wales and Scotland. (colon between preposition and objects)

[**RIGHT**] We traveled to London, Wales and Scotland.