



# Center for Writing and Speaking

## S NO. 3 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

### The Colon

*A colon is formed with two vertical periods and has two primary functions: to introduce something or to separate elements.*

#### Introducing an explanation, example, or appositive

Use a colon before the element you are about to introduce in your sentence.

- *Example:* When quoting from a text, you must cite the information: list the author or publication where the quotation comes from followed by its page number. (The second statement gives an *explanation* of the first).
- *Example:* Kim is never on time for any of her appointments: just last week she arrived thirty minutes late to the Volunteer Council meeting. (The second statement is an *example* of the first).
- *Example:* Students at Agnes Scott abide by the Honor Code: a pledge that we will refrain from behaviors such as cheating, stealing, or plagiarizing. (The second statement provides an *appositive* for the Honor Code.)

#### Introducing a series, list or quotation

Again, use a colon before the element you are about to introduce in your sentence.

- *Example:* Since Mom is working late, she gave me a list of things to pick up at the grocery store: eggs, milk, tomatoes, and ice cream. (the second statement is a list.)
- *Example:* I remember my mother always said the same thing to me each morning as I left for school: "Be sweet and remember that Mother loves you very much." (The colon is placed before the quotation to separate it from the introductory portion of the sentence.)

#### Separating elements

Colons have several standard uses for separating elements.

- Time (hours, minutes, seconds)      9:45 P.M.      5:13:07
- Biblical Chapters and Verses      John 3:16      II Timothy 2:1a
- Titles and Subtitles      *America's Sport: A History of Baseball*

#### Common colon mistakes

- Unless it is separating elements, a colon should come only at the end of an independent clause (a phrase that could stand alone as a complete sentence).
- Colons do not follow expressions like *such as*, *especially*, or *including*. Colons should not be placed between a verb and its object or complement, unless the object is a quotation.

**Incorrect**—My favorite colors are: red, blue, and white.

**Correct**—My favorite colors are red, blue, and white.

**Incorrect**—We frequent several Decatur restaurants such as: Butter and Cream and Raging Burrito

**Correct**—We frequent several Decatur restaurants, such as Butter and Cream and Raging Burrito

**Incorrect**—When John saw his new car, he said: "I can't believe it's actually mine!"

**Correct**—When John saw his car, he said, "I can't believe it's actually mine!"

# AGNES SCOTT