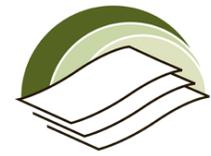


Colons



University Writing Center

Use a colon after an independent clause (sometimes referred to as a “main clause,” or, more simply, as a “complete sentence”) to introduce a list, an appositive, a second independent clause that explains the first, or a quotation

At the beginning of the semester, I always purchase the following: textbooks, notepads, pens, and a new JMU sweatshirt. These are a few of my favorite things: raindrops on roses, whiskers on kittens, and brown paper packages tied up with strings.

And then we saw it: a giant cockroach. My roommate has two really annoying habits: chewing gum loudly and snoring.

The psychology lecture was interesting: the professor lectured about personality disorders. University Writing Center tutors are a wonderful resource: always friendly and knowledgeable, they strive to help JMU students to become better, more confident writers.

(The last two examples above feature a second independent clause after the colon. The *MLA Handbook* suggests that you should begin the second independent clause with a capital letter only if it states a rule or principle, as in “I learned an important lesson: Don’t plagiarize.” The *APA Publication Manual* suggests that you always begin the second independent clause with a capital letter)



The information before a colon must be written as an independent clause:

Incorrect: Many buildings border the quad, including: Wilson, Ashby, and Maury.

Incorrect: The Skyline dorms are: Shenandoah, Chesapeake, and Potomac.

Outgoing JMU president Linwood Rose loosely quoted from Bruce Hornsby’s “Swan Song” in a 2011-2012 speech: “This is no fond farewell. / To be sure, I wish it was no farewell at all.” President Rose then explained his point:

It is not a fond farewell, because I leave behind so many wonderfully talented and committed faculty and staff—many of you I count as not just work associates, but as friends. It is not a fond farewell, because I truly love and value your commitment to our mission and to our students. So many institutions claim it—we live it.



The information before a colon introducing a quotation should almost always be written as an independent clause:

Incorrect: Davy Crockett said: “Be always sure you’re right—then go ahead.”

(Note—the *MLA Handbook* permits a colon after a dependent clause to introduce longer quotations. For instance, in the second President Rose example above, it would be permissible, though not common, to write “He stated:” before the block quotation. The *APA Publication Manual* does not permit a colon “after an introduction that is not an independent clause or complete sentence.”

Other conventional uses for colons

Ratios – The male to female ratio at JMU is 40:60

Salutations in formal letters – Dear Professor Featherstone:

Hours, minutes and seconds – The clock froze at 12:00:00 a.m.

Between a title and a subtitle – *In Pharaoh's Army: Memories of the Lost War*

Between a publication location and publisher in bibliographic entries- Boston: Bedford, 2012

Information adapted from the MLA and APA handbooks, *Rules for Writers* by Diana Hacker and *The New Century Handbook* by Christine Hult and Thomas Huckin

about enlisting us in your classroom/community—visit www.jmu.edu/uwc.