

MAKING SENSE OF COLONS



A colon is a form of punctuation used at the end of a complete sentence to introduce a **list** or **quotation**, offer an **explanation**, or highlight **information**. It prepares the reader for the information that comes after it.



Colons and Independent Clauses

A colon can join two complete sentences (**independent clauses**) when the second clause is connected to the first in terms of content. Capitalization of the first word in the second sentence varies according to the style manual used.

e.g., Exercise improves cognitive function in one key way¹: It promotes the growth of new brain cells, thereby enhancing performance on memory tasks².

- 1 Independent clause
- 2 Independent clause that offers an explanation of the *key way*

Colons and Emphasis/Explanation

A colon follows a complete sentence when introducing a **list** or **quotation**, offering an **example** or **explanation**, or emphasizing a **point**.

e.g., Participants responded to the survey on three occasions¹: baseline, pre-treatment, and post-treatment².

- 1 Independent clause
- 2 List that clarifies the *three occasions*

e.g., Mark Twain said it best¹: "Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter²."

- 1 Independent clause
- 2 Quotation

e.g., Many participants indicated there was a positive outcome of exercising daily¹: reduced symptoms of anxiety².

- 1 Independent clause
- 2 Clarification of the *positive outcome*



Colons **cannot** be used when the writing before the colon is not an independent clause, as in the following sentence:

My favourite foods are: sushi, pizza, and nachos.



Another common use of the colon is to separate a title from a subtitle.

e.g., Star Wars: The force awakens