



DeYoung Consulting Services

Helping People Learn up to Their Potential

How long has it been since you learned all the grammar rules? If you're like me, it's been a few years. Here's a quick reminder on one rule: using colons.

The primary purpose of the colon is to draw your reader's interest to what comes after it. It serves as a little alarm clock to get your attention. Colons are usually followed by explanative or illustrative material; a clarification; a restatement; or, a quote.

If you are using a colon in a sentence to set off a list of items, then it is appropriate to use a lowercase letter following the colon. Here's an example.

Julie made a list of the things she needed to do: fold laundry, go to the bank, and stop at the grocery story.

Sometimes, a colon might be followed by a sentence. In this case start the sentence with a capital letter as is done here.

Bill had to make a decision: Go to the movie with his friends. Or, go out for dinner with his girlfriend.

A colon is also a useful tool in setting the stage for a quote. But be sure to start the quote with a capital letter.

Patrick Henry, one of the heroes of the American Revolution, is best known for saying: "Give me liberty, or give me death!"

Finally, don't use the colon for simple lists, when a comma will do. Use the tool that is most appropriate for the job.

The colon is a great little punctuation mark, but don't overuse it. You'll find that using a colon occasionally will give your writing a more formal feel.

Ready for a challenge? Read the following sentences to see if you can spot which ones use colons correctly. The answers are at the end of this email.

- 1) Paul thought about his problem: how to tell his wife he had a car accident.
- 2) Jeff prefers to go to: restaurants, museums and movies.
- 3) Sarah likes to read mysteries, biographies and short stories.
- 4) President John F. Kennedy challenged Americans when he said: “ask not what you country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

Have a safe and happy Labor Day weekend!

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DeYoung Consulting Services provides quality learning experiences for individuals and groups. We develop materials and activities that advance individual, team, and organizational learning. Our work is done with integrity, reliability, and accountability.

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Here are the answers to the colon quiz.

- 1) Correct
- 2) Incorrect—there’s no need for a colon here.
- 3) Correct
- 4) Incorrect. The a in ask should be capitalized.