Colons

A colon (:) is a punctuation mark used to introduce a list, an explanation, an example, or a quotation. It is also used in the greeting of a business letter.

Usages

1. Use a colon to introduce a list of items after a complete sentence.

   Incorrect:
   The Greek orders are: Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian.

   Correct:
   The Ancient Greeks developed three architectural systems called orders: Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian.

2. Never use a colon after a verb, preposition, or any transitional item.

   Incorrect:
   After school you should: go to the store, see the art exhibit, and do your homework.

   Correct:
   After school, you should do three things: go to the store, see the art exhibit, and do your homework.

3. Use a colon to join two related independent clauses when the second clause is providing explanation or being given emphasis. You may capitalize the first letter of the first word that follows the colon if the second clause is independent, but this choice depends on context.

   Incorrect:
   Stanley forgot one important detail about the safe: Jim likes to play baseball.  
   (The two clauses are unrelated; baseball has nothing to do with the safe.)

   Correct:
   Stanley forgot one important detail about the safe: it locks automatically when you close it.  
   (The two clauses are related. The second clause provides explanation for the first.)
4. Use a colon to introduce a direct quote.

**Example:**
The lecturer offered an honest sound bite to the audience: “If you want to make a difference, you must take a risk.”

5. Use a colon to follow the greeting of a formal business letter even when addressing the person by his or her first name.

**Examples:**
Dear Dr. Jones:
Dear Sarah:

**Activity**
Change the following phrases or sentences to incorporate colons properly.

1. Send application materials to: 1648 Mariposa St, New York, NY 1003.
2. To Whom It May Concern
3. The presenters at the 2012 symposium included: an architect, an entrepreneur, and a biomedical engineer.
4. The factors contributing to childhood obesity include: diet, exercise habits, and genetic background.
5. Sally could not speak. She was stunned.

**Answer Key for Activity**

1. Send application materials to this address: 1648 Mariposa St, New York, NY 10003.
2. To Whom It May Concern:
3. The 2012 symposium included a variety of successful presenters: an architect, an entrepreneur, and a bio-medical engineer.
4. There are three main factors contributing to childhood obesity: diet, exercise habits, and genetic background.
5. Sally could not speak: she was stunned.

**References**
