

Cleaning up the Colon

Colons aren't just the eyes when making smiley faces. They have legitimate uses and you find them in four situations:

1. After a complete sentence followed by a list:
I had many things to do: shop, eat, read, study, and sleep.
He brought his lunch: a tuna sandwich, potato chips, an apple, and a soda.
Wanted: Roommate who doesn't smoke
To Do Today:
 1. Write
 2. Clean the house
 3. Read
2. After a complete statement followed by a complete sentence that explains the statement (between two independent clauses):
Many writers find themselves staring at a blank page, but there's a trick to fix writer's block: Find your muse.
I like winter: the cold air and warm fires make me happy.
There are many benefits to this job: First, it pays well. Second, it is close to home.
3. After the salutation of a letter:
Dear Dr. Adams:
To the Board of Directors:
4. To separate hours from minutes, separate parts of a citation, or separate parts of a title:
5:00 A.M.
Romans 3:16
Paris: An Artist's Paradise

Here is one final tip when using colons: Don't capitalize the word after a colon unless: 1) the clause requires special emphasis, 2) it is a rule, 3) it has two or more sentences, 4) it is a quote, 5) it is a list that starts on a new line, or 6) it follows an introductory word or phrase.