**Colons**

A simple introduction

For more information, see *A Pocket Style Manual* in the COWS library of Writing Wisdom.

Colons emphasize whatever follows to help the reader understand or clarify what they just read. This page presents a few different ways to use colons.

**Use a colon to signal an elaboration, restatement or clarification.**

Examples

* Renee enjoyed her evenings at home: eating, cats, and television.

The “eating, cats, and television” elaborates on “evenings at home.”

* Robert loved only one thing: a dead whale on the beach off Catalina Island.

The “dead whale” restates and clarifies “one thing” with different language.

* Oscar was an unhappy fellow: a brain-fried poet with nothing to write about.

The “brain-fried poet” clarifies “unhappy fellow.”

* Sandy Schnozzer was also unhappy: she had eaten too many English walnuts and now was paying the price.

A colon combines these two complete sentences. The second sentence helps to clarify the first sentence.

**You can use a colon to introduce quotations.**

A colon draws extra attention to the quotation. It is more common to introduce quotations with a verb followed by a comma (e.g. He argued, “I am the best!”).

Examples

Toni Morrison introduces the house in *Beloved* as a character unto itself: “124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom” (3).

When introducing a long, indented quotation, always use a colon.

In *Wuthering Heights,* Nelly treats Heathcliff poorly and dehumanizes him throughout her narration:

They entirely refused to have it in bed with them, or even in their room, and I had no more sense, so, I put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it would be gone on the morrow. By chance, or else attracted by hearing his voice, it crept to Mr. Earnshaw's door, and there he found it on quitting his chamber. Inquiries were made as to how it got there; I was obliged to confess, and in recompense for my cowardice and inhumanity was sent out of the house. (Bronte 78)