

Punctuation: Colon

The colon (:) marks a bigger pause than that is expressed by the semicolon. It is sometimes used with a dash after it.

We cancelled our decision to go on a holiday: we had too little money.

Jane had to be hospitalized: she had heart trouble.

Direct speech

A colon is used when famous sayings are quoted.

Bacon says: 'Reading makes a full man, writing an exact man, speaking a ready man.'

A colon is also used when direct speech is introduced by a name.

Polonius: What do you read, my lord?

Hamlet: Words, words, words.

In other cases, direct speech is usually introduced by a comma.

Peter looked at the photo and said, 'Who is this beautiful girl?'

Lists

A colon can introduce a list.

The three tenses are: the present tense, the past tense and the future tense.

We need three kinds of support: financial, political and moral.

In a title or heading, a colon is often used to introduce a subdivision of a subject.

Tenses: the present tense

Punctuation: colon

Capital letters

In British English, we do not normally use a capital letter after a colon. In American English, colons are more often followed by capital letters.

Punctuation: Colon

Verbs: transitive verbs (GB)

Verbs: Transitive verbs (US)

Letters

In letters Americans usually put a colon after the opening salutation.

Dear Mr. Mathews:

I am writing to...

British people prefer a comma in this case. Sometimes they do not use any punctuation mark at all.

Dear Mr Mathews,

I am writing to...