



University of Houston Law Center
LEGAL WRITING CENTER
Writing is Thinking

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Writing Tip of the Week
Correct Use of the Colon

A colon indicates that what follows is a series, summary, or elaboration of what precedes it.

➤ **Use a Colon to Introduce a Series**

When you use a colon to introduce a series, the material that precedes the colon must be an independent clause that is grammatically complete.

****Note:** Do not put a colon between a verb and its object or between a preposition and its object.

Incorrect—*The subsections that do not apply are: 201-1, 201-1(3)(b), and 201-1(3)(c).*

In the preceding example, a colon has been incorrectly placed between the verb and its objects. To correct the sentence either omit the colon or add an object between the verb and the colon.

Correct—*The subsections that do not apply are 201-1, 201-1(3)(b), and 201-1(3)(c).*

Correct—*The subsections that do not apply are the following: 201-1, 201-1(3)(b), and 201-1(3)(c).*

➤ **Use a Colon to Introduce a Summary, Elaboration, or Illustration**

The damages were staggering: \$1,986,000 in medical bills and \$74,000 in lost wages.

You can also use a colon to join two independent clauses if the first clause introduces the second, or if the two clauses have a cause and effect relationship.

The DNA evidence is vital: it is our only proof that the defendant was at the scene.

Be sure to double-space after a colon.