When to Use the Colon

Writers often use the colon to introduce a list. If you do this, be sure that the colon follows a complete independent clause.

Do not use a colon immediately after a verb or a preposition in the middle of an independent clause.

**For example:**

*Always remember to include: a works cited page, a cover page, and citations.*

*Your paper needs to be accompanied by: your sources, your notes, and your first draft.*

The first is incorrect because the colon interrupts the independent clause by separating the verb from its object. The third example is incorrect because the colon separates the preposition from the object of the preposition.

Consider the following correct revisions for each of the above examples:

*Always remember to include the following items: a works cited page, a cover page, and citations.*

*Your paper needs to be accompanied by all of the materials that you used: your sources, your notes, and your first draft.*
The first is correct because the phrase *the following* finishes the sentence. It is the object of the verb, and so the colon is no longer coming between the object and the verb.

The same holds true for the second sentence, where the phrase *all of the materials* functions as the object of the preposition *by*. This means that the colon is no longer separating, or coming between, the object and the preposition.

**FYI:**

There are also other situations where you use the colon, such as in a bibliographic entry, after a salutation, a biblical reference, etc.

To Whom It May Concern:

John 3:16