

# The Writing Center @ JSCC

## Colons

Colons have two primary uses: to introduce lists (as we've just done) and in subtitles. Here are examples of each use.

### Introducing Lists

Colons are used to introduce lists of information that clarifies the earlier portion of the sentence.

Importantly, the sentence that introduces the list **must be a complete, independent sentence**.

#### Wrong

1. Please bring: pencils, paper, and erasers.
2. I subscribe to: Vogue, Newsweek, Esquire, and Ebony.
3. The author says: "The colon is often misused."

The error in each of these sentences is that the writer tries to use a colon after a group of words that does **not** form a complete, independent sentence.

#### Right

1. Please bring pencils, paper, and erasers. OR
1. Please bring the following supplies: pencils, paper, and erasers.
2. I subscribe to Vogue, Newsweek, Esquire, and Ebony. OR
2. I subscribe to four magazines: Vogue, Newsweek, Esquire, and Ebony
3. The author says, "The colon is often misused." OR
3. The author says important things about grammar: "The colon is often misused."

Notice that you have at least two options for correcting a sentence that misuses a colon. You may either remove the colon altogether (as the first corrections in each example do) or revise the words before the colon into complete, independent sentences.

### Subtitles

Colons are also used in titles with two parts: the main title and the subtitle. The colon follows the main title to introduce the subtitle. The main title need not be a complete sentence for a colon to be used. For example, the following title uses a colon:

- Teaching Online: A Practical Guide