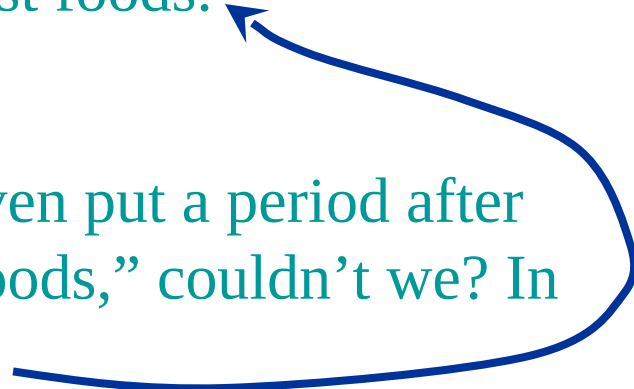


The Colon: a sentence gateway

The colon comes at a point in the sentence where the sentence could come to a complete stop.

I'm going to tell you the names of my favorite breakfast foods.

We could even put a period after the word "foods," couldn't we? In fact, we did.



The Colon: a sentence gateway

We know, however, what's going to come after this period.

I'm going to tell you the names of my favorite breakfast foods. ←

That's right, a LIST of breakfast foods.

The Colon: a sentence gateway

I'm going to tell you the names of my favorite breakfast foods: meuslix, cornflakes, oatmeal, grits and gravy, and yogurt on toast.

And the proper punctuation mark to set off this list from what precedes it is a **colon**. The colon “announces” that a list is about to follow; it is the gateway to that list.

The Colon: a sentence gateway

My favorite breakfast foods are meuslix, cornflakes, oatmeal, grits and gravy, and yogurt on toast.

Would I use a colon in the sentence above?

No, because the sentence does not come to a halt here.

Instead, the sentence flows right into the list. A colon would not be appropriate here.

The Colon: a sentence gateway

Examine this next sentence carefully.

Our math tutor wants just one thing from us that we try our best.

Here, we have an independent thought (ending with “us”).

followed by another kind of completer (a noun clause).

The Colon: a sentence gateway

We also use the colon to set off a formal quotation.

My father was always using his favorite quotation from Yogi

Berra: “It ain’t over till it’s over.”

The Colon: a sentence gateway

To set off this completer, this *explanation*, we can use a colon.

Our math tutor wants just one thing
from us : that we try our best.

These are the two main uses of the colon:
to set off a list or an explanation that we know is about to follow the main part of the sentence.

The Colon: a sentence gateway

Just remember that you usually know what is going to follow a colon: a list, an explanation, or a formal quotation.

CONGRATULATIONS!

You have now mastered the uses of the colon, a very handy device in the punctuation of your sentences. Don't forget to take the quizzes on punctuation listed on the [Quiz List](#) page of the **Guide to Grammar and Writing**.

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