Using Colons

Colons *are used* to introduce lists at the end of a sentence.

Science fiction inspired three major inventions in the 20th century: the fallout shelter, the nuclear missile, and the quantum computer.

Colons *are used* to introduce an explanation or example of something just mentioned in a sentence.

Rattlesnakes are dangerous: their venom is poisonous and they are quick to bite.

Colons *are used* to introduce an MLA-style block quotation in essays.

In his manifesto, Congressman Richards declares that:

> “Everyone in a free and prosperous society like the United States should get a decent education. Further, they should be able to do so at the institution of their choice.”

Colons *are not used* after *such as* or *including*. Generally, these words do not need any punctuation after them.

Incorrect: Most people including: Kim Jong Il, Fidel Castro and Vladimir Putin, have all experienced dragon-related nightmares. *(Leave out the colon for a correct sentence.)*

Colons *are not used* directly after a form of the verb *to be*.

Incorrect: Some of a ninjas preferred weapons are: fists, legs, eyes, and the mind. *(Leave out the colon for a correct sentence.)*

Colons *are not used* between a verb and its object or between a preposition and its subject.

Incorrect: US pilots have been to: the moon, the center of the Earth, and Cleveland. Incorrect: Things that we excel at are: golf, boxing, and basketball. *(Leave out the colon for a correct sentence.)*