

UNCG



THE UNIVERSITY
WRITING CENTER
3211 HHRA BUILDING

THE COLON

Related Handouts: TERMS TO KNOW: Vital Sentence Elements; APPOSITIVES;
COMMA SPLICES AND RUN-ON SENTENCES

THE PRINCIPLE

The general purpose of the colon is this: it says, **STOP!** Important clump of words dead ahead! The colon serves to introduce an explanation, an example, an appositive, a series, a list, or a quotation. The colon is a signal for the reader to expect upcoming information. The colon always comes after a completed **independent clause**.

THE PROBLEM/SOLUTION

Here are some sentences with missing or misused colons followed by a brief explanation and the corrected sentence.

1. Ideology is like the force, it surrounds us, binds us, and connects us.

This sentence needs a colon after the word “force.” The information after the colon clarifies or explains the first part of the sentence. In addition, this sentence actually contains two **independent clauses**. Joining them with a comma creates a **comma splice** error.

*Ideology is like **the force: it surrounds** us, binds us, and connects us.*

2. Yoda expects results beyond mere effort “Do or do not; there is no try.”

If an **independent clause** precedes your quotation, use a colon. This is also another example of an explanation that follows a colon. What’s after the colon is the crucial information that the writer wants the reader to understand.

*Yoda expects results beyond mere **effort: “Do or do not; there is no try.”***

3. There seems to be an abundance of films in the Star Wars series such as: A New Hope, The Empire Strikes Back, Return of the Jedi, Phantom Menace, Attack of the Clones, and now Revenge of the Sith.

When listing items, do not use a colon after “such as” or “include” or “including” because the **independent clause** is not yet complete.

*There seems to be an abundance of films in the Star Wars series, **such as A New Hope, The Empire Strikes Back, Return of the Jedi, Phantom Menace, Attack of the Clones, and now Revenge of the Sith.***

4. My favorite moments in *Star Wars* include: Han Solo's carbonite nap, Luke's visit to Dagobah, and Princess Leia's big hair.

This is another example of a list.

*My favorite moments in Star Wars include **Han Solo's carbonite nap**, Luke's visit to Dagobah, and Princess Leia's big hair.*

In another example of a list, you can use a colon after the phrase "the following" because the phrase completes the independent clause.

*My favorite moments in Star Wars include **the following: Han Solo's carbonite nap**, Luke's visit to Dagobah, and Princess Leia's big hair.*

5. At the Cantina, Luke was stunned by Obi-Wan's decision to hire a character of such low repute, the notorious but skilled Han Solo.

Although using a comma after the word "repute" is correct, the information comes at the end of the sentence and functions as an **appositive** (it renames and describes the character of low repute). It can, therefore, be set off with a colon for added emphasis.

*At the Cantina, Luke was stunned by Obi-Wan's decision to hire a character of such low **repute: the notorious** but skilled Han Solo.*