



THE COLON CONNECTION



Each punctuation mark is like a single breath. Some punctuation markings are just quick gulps of air, while others are deep intakes, creating pause. Imagine a sentence without pause; you know the kind, those pesky ramblings that run so fast that you can hardly keep your breath keeping up while you keep reading all those long, lengthy words without pause (see what I mean?). For the reader, run-ons cause disconnect. And since our writing is a way to connect, we must punctuate.

The comma, for example, is a nice, fast inhale, and it keeps us chugging along. Then there's the semicolon, a much deeper breath of air. But the period is the deepest breath, ultimately satisfying. However, there's another type of punctuation mark, one that sweetens the lungs without overdoing the pause: **THE COLON.**

THE COLON divides the sentence. What follows the colon always elaborates on the preceding clause. Because we don't use the colon as often as other punctuation marks, the emphasis of what follows is strengthened.

Here's how and when:

1. A LIST OF PARTICULARS: Notice here that the colon connects the independent clause with the list. It also creates just enough space between the sentence and list so that the list stands out and nothing is forgotten.

Example: The earth that we had left raked and bare the night before was green with young plants: **poppies and sweet williams, snapdragons, pansies, and love-in-a-mist.**

2. AN APPOSITIVE PHRASE: A colon is helpful when, because of the sentence's length or complexity of detail, the reader may miss the last few words of the sentence. Notice that words after the colon are a fragment, an appositive phrase renaming the noun closest to it.

Example: In the barrel were the remains of his father: **his real father.**

3. AN INDEPENDENT CLAUSE: A colon can connect two complete sentences. But here, we must make sure that what follows the colon expands upon the preceding clause.

Example: They were dry: **they cracked and broke at the touch of the rake.**

4. AFTER AN INDEPENDENT CLAUSE INTRODUCING A QUOTE: When the introduction to a quote is a full sentence, the colon is an effective tool for connecting the two.

Example: We are forced to empathize with Sarah's character as an outsider when she reveals the details of her experience: **"And I, the witch child, was the one whose hands were burned with hot match-ends behind the cycle shed, to see if it hurt."**