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 <u>the force, it surrounds</u> 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 <u>effort "Do</u> 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 <u>such as: A New Hope</u>, <u>The
Empire Strikes Back</u>, <u>Return of the Jedi</u>, <u>Phantom Menace</u>, <u>Attack of the Clones</u>, and now
<u>Revenge of the Sith</u>.

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

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

4. My favorite moments in *Star Wars* <u>include: Han</u> 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 <u>Star Wars</u> **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 <u>Star Wars</u> **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 <u>repute, the notorious</u> 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, therefored, 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.*