

When to Use a Colon to Introduce a List



twinkl



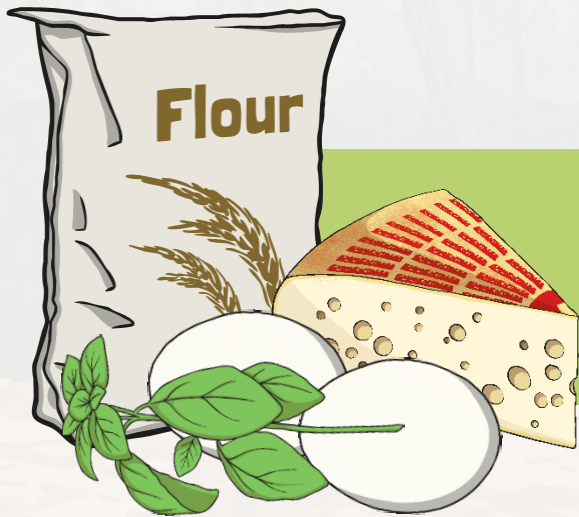
What is a Colon?

A colon looks like this

:

Colons can be used before a list of words, phrases or clauses.

Here is an example:



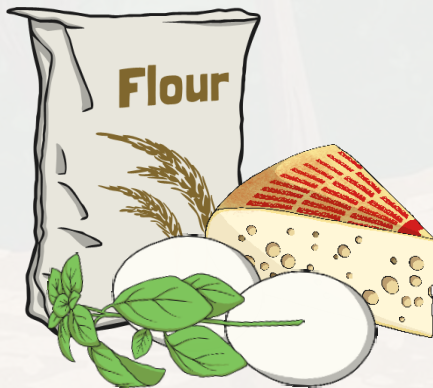
Here are the things you will need: flour, two eggs, cheese and fresh basil.

What is a Colon?

The colon comes before the start of the list.

Items in the list are separated by commas.

Here are the things you will need: flour, two eggs, cheese and fresh basil.



'and' is used before the last item in the list, this does not need a comma.

Colons for Bullet Points

A colon might also be used to introduce a series of bullet points.

This is the recommended kit list for the camping trip:

- tent
- camp stove
- sleeping bag
- food
- dry clothes



The Tricky Bit

A colon is not always needed to introduce a list. This means that when we are writing a list we need to make a decision about whether it needs a colon or not.



But how am I supposed to make such a difficult decision?

The Tricky Bit

This is the key question to ask when you're deciding whether or not to use a colon:

Does the phrase before my list make sense on its own?

If the phrase does make sense on its own, we can use a colon. If it does not, we should not use one.

Here is an example:

The pot held pencils, rubbers and elastic bands.

The pot contained the following: pencils, rubbers and elastic bands.



Which List Needs a Colon?

The drink contains milk, strawberries and ice cream.

The drink contains the following: milk, strawberries and ice cream.

Which List Needs a Colon?

The drink contains milk, strawberries and ice cream.

The drink contains the following: milk, strawberries and ice cream.



Sentence B needs a colon because the phrase before the list makes sense on its own.

Which List Needs a Colon?

The children can choose from a range of activities: tennis, orienteering or swimming.

The children can choose whether to play tennis, go orienteering or have a swim.

Which List Needs a Colon?

The children can choose from a range of activities: tennis, orienteering or swimming.

The children can choose whether to play tennis, go orienteering or have a swim.



Sentence A needs a colon because the phrase before the list makes sense on its own.