Colons

I. The COLON rules you may already know

a. for time
   • five-thirty is 5:30

b. in mathematical ratios
   • the ratio of dog to cats is 3:8

c. in titles, to make them look nice and fancy
   • The Wicked Cymbal: Time and Rhythm in Greene’s Early Works

d. in MLA citation

e. in formal letter writing
   • Dear Sir or Madam: I am writing to inform you that I learned the rules of colons today.

II. The COLON rules you may recall (*be careful!)

a. when writing a list within a sentence
   • I forgot to bring the following things to my sister’s wedding: the flower, the garter, the cheese dip, and the groom.

Be sure to avoid unnecessary colons! You need not use a colon in the following: I forgot to bring: the flower, the garter, the cheese dip, and the groom.

b. when setting off an appositive, which is similar to making a list
   • I have read two of Kaelan Greene’s books: Trump and Dog and Hyacinth Powders.

c. when setting off a quotation
   • Don’t forget what your dad used to tell us: “Keep your fingers out of the disposal.”

*Be sure that the phrase before the colon is a complete sentence! It would be incorrect to use a colon in the following sentence:

Your dad used to tell us: “Keep your fingers out of the disposal!”

CORRECT: Your dad used to tell us, “Keep your fingers out of the disposal!”
III. The COLON rule that is a bit tricky: **between two clauses if the second explains the first**

- The punishment for talking out of turn is harsh: you have to do 50 pushups.

This handout is adapted from University of Alabama Writing Center Website. Only the format has been changed.