Using colons

Consider the punctuation of the following two independent clauses.

1. For years the Romans ignored the feelings of slaves. The repercussion of this course of action was made clear by Spartacus.

{*This first example separates the clauses into two sentences. They are closely related because of proximity, they come one after the other, and by sense.*}

2. For years the Romans ignored the feelings of slaves, and the repercussion of this course of action was made clear by Spartacus.

{*This example joins the clauses with the simplest of coordinating conjunctions, "and." The relationship between the clauses is closer than in the first example; they are now joined in one sentence.*}

3. For years the Romans ignored the feelings of slaves; the repercussion of this course of action was made clear by Spartacus. {*As in example two, the independent clauses have been joined into one sentence. Here a semicolon joins the ideas and suggests but does not comment on a close logical relationship between the two clauses.*}

4. For years the Romans ignored the feelings of slaves: the repercussion of this course of action was made clear by Spartacus. {*Here a colon joins the two ideas. When compared with a semicolon, the colon suggests more significance; it promises that the second clause will explain, amplify, or comment upon the first.*}

Examples of colon use

1. The bookbinder counted his tools: 3 sewing needles, 1 polishing iron, 6 decorative rolls, 2 paring knives, and 1 gold foil knife.

2. The book was a splendid wreck: its once bright pages were faded and torn; the sophisticated sewing had broken down; and the ornate back cover was missing.

3. The owner had one question: what would it cost to fix it?