

YAML key

YAML key — alphanumeric and dashes followed by colon.

```
^([a-zA-Z_][\w-]*)\s*:
```

Token-by-token breakdown

Token	Meaning
^	start of string (or line in multiline mode)
(	start of a capturing group
[a-zA-Z_]	any of: lowercase letters, uppercase letters, “_”
[\w-]*	zero or more: any of: word chars (A–Z, a–z, 0–9, _), “-”
)	end of group
\s*	zero or more: whitespace
:	literal text “.”

Quick usage in 7 languages

JavaScript	<pre>const re = /^[a-zA-Z_][\w-]*\s*:;/; re.test(value);</pre>
Python	<pre>import re re.match(r"^[a-zA-Z_][\w-]*\s*:", value)</pre>
Java	<pre>Pattern.compile("^[a-zA-Z_][\\w-]*\\s*:").matcher(value).matches();</pre>
C# / .NET	<pre>Regex.IsMatch(value, @"^[a-zA-Z_][\w-]*\s*:");</pre>
Go	<pre>regexp.MustCompile(`^[a-zA-Z_][\w-]*\s*:`).MatchString(value)</pre>
Ruby	<pre>/^[a-zA-Z_][\w-]*\s*:/.match?(value)</pre>
PHP	<pre>preg_match('~^[a-zA-Z_][\w-]*\s*:~', \$value);</pre>

Common pitfalls

- **Anchored to the whole string.** This pattern uses ^, so it requires the entire input to match. To find it inside a longer text, drop the anchors and use the global (g) flag.
- **ASCII letters only.** [a-zA-Z] excludes accented and non-Latin letters (é, ü, ß, ñ, and non-Latin scripts). For international input use Unicode properties like \p{L} with the u flag.
- **Escape it correctly per language.** In Java and JavaScript strings each backslash must be doubled (\\d); in Python, Go, and C# use raw/verbatim strings so the backslashes survive.
- **Validate beyond format.** Matching the format doesn't guarantee the value is real. Confirm the yaml key against a source of truth (database, API, or checksum) where it matters.