

Using Quotations and Dialogue

There are two common situations in which you might use quotations: when you are indicating the use of exact or direct quotation within a scholarly work, and when you are writing dialogue. When using quotation marks, it is important to follow certain rules so you don't confuse your reader.

For All Quotation Marks

- Quote only the exact words of the speaker/writer.
- When leading into quotations with an introductory phrase, use a comma to introduce the quotation. The quotation will begin with a capital letter.
 - My teacher makes a good point when she says, “Using quotation marks and punctuation correctly is impressive.”
- When leading into quotations with a complete sentence, use a colon to introduce the quotation. The quotation will still begin with a capital letter.
 - Mary Poppins is an optimist: “Remember, just a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down.”
- If a quotation is integrated into your own sentence structure, do not use introductory punctuation other than the quotation marks.
 - My roommate describes herself as “unemployed” and says that soon she will “hit the bottom of the barrel” and apply for a job at Burger King.
- Periods and commas are always inside quotation marks, even if they do not appear in the original quotation.
 - However, if you are writing a documented paper using parenthetical citations, “Put the period at the end of the citation, not within the quotation” (Raimes 342).
- Question marks and exclamation points that were an original part of the quoted material go within the quotation marks with no additional comma or period.
 - “Help me!” she exclaimed.

Question marks and exclamation points that are part of your sentence, but not the quotation, go outside the quotation marks.

- Was the name of the story we read in class yesterday “The Yellow Wallpaper”?
- Colons and semicolons are placed outside quotation marks.
 - She asked me why her cat was crying “like a baby”; I told her the food dish was probably empty.
- Single quotation marks indicate a quotation within a quotation.
 - Jane said, “My boss calling me ‘toots’ was totally inappropriate.”
- If a quotation from one speaker continues for multiple paragraphs, do not close the quotation at the end of the paragraphs until the quotation ends. However, open each paragraph with quotation marks so your readers know the quotation continues.
- Titles of short works, such as poems, articles, and songs, go in quotation marks. Titles of long works, such as books, magazines or newspapers, and CD names, are italicized.

Dialogue

- Every time the speaker changes, begin a new paragraph (indent).
- If a person performs an action as they speak, punctuate the quotation and the action separately.
 - **Incorrect:** “I don’t know what to do,” Sally set her glass down, “he’s never acted like this before.”
 - **Correct:** “I don’t know what to do.” Sally set her glass down. “He’s never acted like this before.”
- If the quotation is set off by dialogue tags, the quotation and the tag are punctuated as one sentence.
 - **Incorrect:** “Don’t worry about it.” Jenny said as she took Sally’s hand, “Everything will work out for the best.”
 - **Correct:** “Don’t worry about it,” Jenny said as she took Sally’s hand. “Everything will work out for the best.”

Notice in the above example that the sentence ends with the action of Jenny taking Sally’s hand. The next segment of dialogue is punctuated as its own sentence.