

# CONTROLLING QUOTATION MARKS

Quotation marks pose a problem for many writers, but a few simple rules can make them easy to use. Although these marks are most often found in dialogue, other writing situations require them as well.

## USING QUOTATION MARKS IN DIRECT QUOTATIONS

- use double quotation marks to set off a direct quotation or thought within a sentence or paragraph. This includes quotations that are signed, etched, inscribed, carved, etc.

The managers called our new pricing policy “the innovation of the decade.”

We thought he said, “Turn right at the corner.”

The sign read, “No Smoking.”

“Eccentric and Erratic,” the headstone read.

- Do not use quotation marks for a paraphrase, or the restatement of a direct quotation or thought in other words. The examples below illustrate the difference.

We thought he said, “Turn right at the corner.” (direct quotation)

We thought he said to turn right at the corner. (paraphrase)

“When will help arrive?” I wondered. (direct thought)

I wondered when help would arrive. (paraphrase of a thought)

The sign clearly read, “No Smoking.” (signed words)

The sign said not to smoke. (paraphrase)

- Use single quotation marks to set off a quotation within a quotation.

“Jane heard her say, ‘The delivery is scheduled for 9:00.’” said Florence.

The lecturer continued, “Remember the salesman’s motto: ‘You can’t sell it if your pitch is lousy.’”

Our doctor always says, “Haven’t I told you my mother’s famous words: ‘Healthy mind, healthy body?’”

## USING QUOTATION MARKS IN DIALOGUE

Correctly punctuating dialogue means understanding how to use quotation marks, commas, and end marks. Take a close look at the sentences in the dialogue sample below: They include the basic dialogue structures. The words quoted are called quotations, and the words explaining who said the quotations are called tags. In the examples below, the tags are highlighted.

“I’m really hungry. I want something to eat,” **said Harry**.

**Nina answered**, “I’m hungry, but I don’t have any cash. Do you have some?”

“What is this?” **Harry asked**. “You’re the one with the manager’s job.”

“Yes,” **Nina said**, “but credit cards are all I ever carry.”

Quoted words are always surrounded by quotation marks. Place quotation marks before a group of quoted words and again at the end. Tags are punctuated differently depending on where they are in the sentence.

- If the tag follows a quotation, and the quotation is a sentence normally ending with a period, use a comma instead. The period comes at the end of the tag. (See the first example sentence, above.)

However, if the quotation is a sentence normally ending with a question mark or an exclamation point, insert the question mark or exclamation point. Place a period after the tag, but do not use a comma. The examples below illustrate these rules.

“I’m really hungry. Let’s grab something to eat,” said David.

“I’m really hungry. Do you want to grab something to eat?” asked David.

“I’m really hungry. Hold it—a Bonanza!” exclaimed David.

- When the tag comes before the quotation, place a comma after the tag. Put quotation marks around the quoted words, capitalize the first word of the quotation, and punctuate the sentence as you would normally, as in the sentences below.

David said, “I’m really hungry. Let’s grab something to eat.”

David said, “I’m really hungry. Do you want to grab something to eat?”

David said, “I’m really hungry. Hold it—a Bonanza!”

- Sometimes, the tag interrupts the quotation. If both the first and second parts of the quotation are complete sentences, the first part of the quotation is punctuated in the same way as a quotation with the tag at the end. In other words, the period follows the tag. The rest of the quotation is punctuated in the same way as a quotation preceded by a tag. See the example sentences below.

“I’m really hungry,” said David. “Let’s grab something to eat.”

“Do you want to grab something to eat?” David asked. “I’m really hungry.”

“Hold it—a Bonanza!” exclaimed David. “I’m really hungry.”

- When the tag interrupts a sentence, the words preceding the tag begin the thought, and the words following the tag complete the thought. Place quotation marks around the quoted words and follow the first part of the quotation with a comma. Place a comma after the tag—not a period, since the sentence is not completed. Place quotation marks around the last part of the quotation, but do not capitalize the first letter of the quotation, as it is not the beginning of a new sentence. Punctuate the rest of the sentence as you would normally. See the example sentences below.

“The Carters just don’t understand,” observed Solomon, “why they upset you so.”

“This lawn care service,” explained Alvin, “provides fertilizer, seed, and weed control.”

“What I can’t see,” mused Mel, “is what you see in him.”

**Note:** All of the punctuation is inside the quotation marks except for the punctuation marks following the tags.

### DIALOGUE AT A GLANCE

- Tags following a quotation:

“\_\_\_\_\_,” said Rose.

“\_\_\_\_\_?” asked Rose.

“\_\_\_\_\_!” exclaimed Rose.

- Tags preceding a quotation:

Iris said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”

Iris asked, “\_\_\_\_\_?”

Iris exclaimed, “\_\_\_\_\_!”

- Tags between two sentences of a quotation:

“\_\_\_\_\_,” said Lily. “\_\_\_\_\_.”

“\_\_\_\_\_?” asked Lily. “\_\_\_\_\_?”

“\_\_\_\_\_!” exclaimed Lily. “\_\_\_\_\_!”

- Tags interrupting a one-sentence quotation:

“\_\_\_\_\_,” said Daisy, “\_\_\_\_\_.”

“\_\_\_\_\_,” asked Daisy, “\_\_\_\_\_?”

“\_\_\_\_\_,” exclaimed Daisy, “\_\_\_\_\_!”

## OTHER USES FOR QUOTATION MARKS

- Use quotation marks to set off nicknames and words used as slang.

Kristy was dubbed “Miss Hustle” by her teammates.

All the kids said the new CD was really “bad.”

- Use quotation marks to indicate irony or raised eyebrows. Avoid overusing quotation marks in this way. It doesn’t work if you do it all the time.

My yearly “evaluation” involved a three-minute conversation with the boss.

That “consultant” offered no advice or counsel.

Their idea of a “good time” is popcorn and a movie.

- Use quotation marks to set off titles of certain items. Other titles should be italicized. See the table on this page for the differences.

Enclose in Quotation Marks	Italicize
name of a short story or chapter of a book	title of a novel
name of a TV program	name of a movie
title of a poem	title of a collection of poetry or an epic poem
headline of an article or title of a report	name of a magazine or newspaper
title of a song	title of a musical or long musical composition
	name of a ship, plane, train, etc.

## ITALICS INSTEAD OF QUOTATION MARKS

Italics are used instead of quotation marks for titles of the items in the second column of the above table. They are also used when referring to words as words, and for emphasis:

### Words as words:

The word *food* always brought a smile to his face.

### Emphasis:

I have *never* seen anyone so fond of music.

## QUOTATION MARKS WITH OTHER PUNCTUATION MARKS

Here are the rules for combining quotation marks with other punctuation marks:

- Question marks, exclamation points, and dashes go *inside* quotation marks if they are part of a quotation. If they are not, place them *outside* the quotation marks.

The dentist asked, “Can you feel me probing in this area?” (part of the quotation)

Did you watch last week’s “Seinfeld”? (not part of the quotation)

“I wish I’d never heard of—” Calvin stopped suddenly as Kelly entered the room. (part of the quotation)

My favorite song will always be “The Rose”! (not part of the quotation)

- Periods and commas go *inside* closing quotation marks.

“Wait for half an hour,” suggested Dalia, “before you go swimming.”

- Colons and semicolons go *outside* closing quotation marks.

Here’s how I felt about last week’s “Friends”: I loved it.

The interviewer dismissed the remark as a “slip of the tongue”; the guest was insulted.

## CONTROLLING QUOTATION MARKS

Name:

Practice: *Use what you have learned about quotation marks to correct the following sentences.*

1. Do you ever watch Touched by an Angel on CBS? asked Steven.
2. Which one of you called me a cowardly excuse for a soldier? barked the sergeant.
3. After reading To Kill a Mockingbird, I rented the movie.
4. An extra five minutes at lunch was our prize.
5. All the teenagers at the party were duded out.
6. If you want to know why I'm so bitter, read my article Rosy Glasses in the latest copy of our newsletter, The Tower.
7. I wish that old fussbudget—Melanie stopped abruptly as Mr. Harris walked into the room.
8. Do you call everyone by the name Bubba asked Katie.
9. The investigator asked us where we had spent the evening.
10. Don't make outrageous excuses my attorney advised that will only make matters worse.
11. Ebenezer said I told you the representative said No way before I ever had a chance to explain.
12. Why are you still here my supervisor asked everyone else went home an hour ago.
13. We were shocked by our Christmas bonus a bag with a cookie and an orange.
14. Looking at her tardy record, I see why you've named her Punctual Paula.
15. Get out of the way yelled the captain.