Quotation Marks in Dialogue

Use quotation marks to show that you are writing the exact words that someone said, thought, or wrote.

General Usage

Enclose direct quotations in quotation marks. Quotation marks always appear in pairs, one pair at the beginning of the quote and another pair at the end of the quote. For example:

> "Mr. President, you have a reputation as a quiet man," said Coolidge's dinner companion. "I have wagered a dollar that I can get you to say more than three words."
> "You lose, madam," replied the President.

Don't use quotation marks for indirect quotations--statements that summarize or paraphrase a person's remarks. One clue that you're writing an indirect quotation is your use of the word *that*. For example:

> Mr. Coolidge's dinner companion stated *that* the President was a quiet man.

Use single quotation marks to enclose a quotation within a quotation. For example:

> She said, "People who say 'Let me be honest with you' seldom are."

To quote a specific word or phrase, use quotation marks. For example:

> One engineer called the company's drug-testing program "a paranoid reaction."

Dialogue – Conversation between Two or More People

When writing dialogue, every time you change speakers, start a new paragraph.

> "Peter called to tell me Donna has been arrested," Sarah burst out as I walked in.

> "Donna . . . arrested?" I was astounded. Donna was mouselike, anything but likely to be in trouble with the police. "What has she done?"

> Sarah was distraught, eyes puffed and red from crying. Wadded tissues were piled on the table next to her chair. "She went out shopping," she said, trying at last to speak clearly. "And she stole . . . she stole . . . ."

> "Well, for heaven's sake," I said, "thousands of people shoplift. So why all this excessive drama?"

"She stole a *baby*."

--adapted from Dick Francis, *Twice Shy*

Special Usage (Note: Italics may also be used in these three situations.)

Use quotation marks with foreign words. For example: Maria felt "simpatico" toward the rebel forces.

Add quotation marks to technical terms that would be unfamiliar to most readers. For example: Ecologists define a "chryocore" as a region of perpetual ice and snow.

Use quotation marks when a word is being singled out for emphasis or definition. For example: I often confuse the words "accept" and "except."

Punctuation Used with Quotation Marks

Periods and commas always go inside the closing quotation marks. For example: "Come back next week," the doctor told Gus. "We can check your blood pressure then."

Question marks and exclamation points go inside the closing quotation marks when only the quoted material is either a question or an exclamation. For example: He asked, "Where are they now?" She shouted, "The dam broke!"

Question marks and exclamation points go outside the closing quotation marks when the entire sentence forms a question or an exclamation. For example:
Who said, "To err is human"? I have told you for the last time to stop calling me your "little sweetie"!

A direct quotation begins with a capital letter unless it is a sentence fragment or an interrupted thought. For example:
The travel agent said, "Our city is usually warm in the spring."
"Once," said Madeline, "my family rode a train to Maine."
"San Francisco remains one of my favorite cities," the critic reported. "My opinion may change, however, once I see Vancouver."
"Everyone I know likes the stores in Chicago," said my friend.

If the same speaker's words are longer than one paragraph, begin each new paragraph with quotation marks, but don't add closing quotation marks until the quote ends. For example:
"This is a city I could get used to," said Ellen, sweeping her hand through the air. "The rent's cheap, and I can get a job anywhere. I won't even need a car because I can always ride my bike or take the Metro.
"But best of all," she noted, "I can be at the beach in five minutes."

College Writing Center

at Meramec