

Quotation Marks

The rules set forth in this section are customary in the United States. Great Britain and other countries in the Commonwealth of Nations are governed by quite different conventions. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Rule 4 in this section, a rule that has the advantage of being far simpler than Britain's and the disadvantage of being far less logical.

Rule 1. Use double quotation marks to set off a direct (word-for-word) quotation.

Correct: *"I hope you will be here," he said.*

Incorrect: *He said that he "hoped I would be there."* (The quotation marks are incorrect because *hoped I would be there* does not state the speaker's exact words.)

Rule 2a. Always capitalize the first word in a complete quotation, even midsentence.

Example: *Lamarr said, "The case is far from over, and we will win."*

Rule 2b. Do not capitalize quoted material that continues a sentence.

Example: *Lamarr said that the case was "far from over" and that "we will win."*

Rule 3a. Use commas to introduce or interrupt direct quotations.

Examples:

He said, "I don't care."

"Why," I asked, "don't you care?"

This rule is optional with one-word quotations.

Example: *He said "Stop."*

Rule 3b. If the quotation comes before *he said, she wrote, they reported, Dana insisted,* or a similar attribution, end the quoted material with a comma, even if it is only one word.

Examples:

"I don't care," he said.

"Stop," he said.

Rule 3c. If a quotation functions as a subject or object in a sentence, it might not need a comma.

Examples:

Is "I don't care" all you can say to me?

Saying "Stop the car" was a mistake.

Rule 4. Periods and commas ALWAYS go inside quotation marks.

Examples:

The sign said, "Walk." Then it said, "Don't Walk," then, "Walk," all within thirty seconds.

He yelled, "Hurry up."

Rule 5a. The placement of question marks with quotation marks follows logic. If a question is within the quoted material, a question mark should be placed inside the quotation marks.

Examples:

She asked, "Will you still be my friend?"

The question *Will you still be my friend?* is part of the quotation.

Do you agree with the saying, "All's fair in love and war"?

The question *Do you agree with the saying?* is outside the quotation.

Rule 5b. If a quoted question ends in midsentence, the question mark replaces a comma.

Example: *"Will you still be my friend?" she asked.*

Rule 6. Quotation marks are used for components, such as chapter titles in a book, individual episodes of a TV series, songs from a Broadway show or a music album, titles of articles or essays in print or online, and shorter works such as short stories and poems.

It is customary in American publishing to put the title of an entire composition in italics. Put the title of a short work—one that is or could be part of a larger undertaking—in quotation marks.

A "composition" is a creative, journalistic, or scholarly enterprise that is whole, complex, a thing unto itself. This includes books, movies, plays, TV shows, newspapers, magazines, websites, music albums, operas, musical theater, paintings, sculptures, and other works of art.

Example: Richard Burton performed the song "Camelot" in the 1960 Broadway musical *Camelot*.

Although the word is the same, "Camelot" the song takes quotation marks because it's part of a larger work—namely, a full-length show called *Camelot*.

Rule 7. Use single quotation marks for quotations within quotations.

Example: *Dan said: "In a town outside Brisbane, I saw 'Tourists go home' written on a wall. But then someone told me, 'Pay it no mind, lad.' "*

Note that the period goes inside both the single and double quotation marks. Also note that, as a courtesy, there is visible space between adjacent single and double quotation marks.

Rule 8a. Quotation marks are often used with technical terms, terms used in an unusual way, or other expressions that vary from standard usage.

Examples:

It's an oil-extraction method known as "fracking."

He did some "experimenting" in his college days.

I had a visit from my "friend" the tax man.

Rule 8b. Never use single quotation marks in sentences like the previous three.

Incorrect: *I had a visit from my 'friend' the tax man.*

The single quotation marks in the above sentence are intended to send a message to the reader that *friend* is being used in a special way: in this case, sarcastically. Avoid this invalid usage. Single quotation marks are valid only within a quotation, as per Rule 7, above.

Rule 9. When quoted material runs more than one paragraph, start each new paragraph with opening quotation marks, but do not use closing quotation marks until the end of the passage.

Example:

She wrote: "I don't paint anymore. For a while I thought it was just a phase that I'd get over.

"Now, I don't even try."