



Quotation Marks: How and When to Use Them

Indicating title

Quotation marks are used to indicate the titles of articles, poems, essays, short stories, and songs.

Examples: Maya Angelou read “Late October” at Concordia’s poetry reading.

Whalen, Lisa. “Relaxation Habits of the Purple Poke-a-Dot Trout.” *Journal of Outdoor Living for Purple Fish* 46(2004): 212-250. (Note: MLA work cited format.)

Using Someone Else’s Words

When you are quoting a source, use quotation marks to identify the source’s words.

Example: Mario said, “Luigi has always been taller than I.”

Times to quote are:

- When the author’s words get across the point better than you can by paraphrasing.
- When the author’s words are so clear and concise that paraphrasing them would be redundant.
- When the author has a strong background on the topic; the author’s credentials or proven knowledge on the topic will lend further credibility to what you are saying.

Quoting a Quote

When one of your sources quotes another person, you should indicate which words each person said. You can do this by providing an explanation in the set-up for your quote or by using double and single quotation marks.

Examples: In his article, “Quotation Marks Are the Best Punctuation,” Malik Jarod quotes Usar’s assertion that “quotation marks are far superior to commas or apostrophes” (6). (Note: the in-text citation is formatted according to MLA style.)

The question mark admitted yesterday that quotation marks “are an extraordinary type of punctuation” (qtd. in Jarod 323). (Note: the in-text citation is MLA style.)

Punctuation with Quotes (a few tricky situations)

Most punctuation goes inside the quote marks. Exceptions are colons and semicolons.

”Examples: Betty said, “I can’t tango.
“Can you tango?” Betty asked.
Her hat was the “cream de la crème”; she won best hat award of course.
It was a four-course meal “fit for a king”: appetizers, salad, soup, and dessert.

Question marks, dashes, and exclamation marks only go inside the quotation marks if they belong to the material being quoted.

Examples: Did you say, “I’ll help out”?

“May I come too?” is the name of my favorite song.

“There is a mouse in the house!” shouted Jose.

Mother left notes on the fridge, reading, “Make your bed,” “Will you be home for dinner?” and “Brush your teeth.” (note: there is no comma after the question mark.)

Double and Single Quotation Marks

Double quotation marks indicate the beginning and end of a quote. Sometimes, however, you may need to quote someone who is using another person’s words. Single quotation marks then indicate where the quote within the quote begins and ends.

Examples: When I asked the shark why he wouldn’t eat salmon, he replied, “I won’t eat a fish that my father, the ‘expert,’ says is ‘too fishy for consumption’ because it swims upstream.”

In his article, “The Best of Quotation Marks,” Mr. Clause writes, “I have heard on numerous occasions Ms. Comma say, ‘I can’t and won’t connect two complete sentences unless I am given a conjunction to help me. The conjunctions support my position, saying that to leave them out is “promoting irresponsible grammar,” and they won’t go along with it.’”

(Note: Punctuation goes *inside* of the end quote marks.)

How Often to Use Quotes

As a general rule of thumb, try not to include more than one quote per paragraph and include a quote only when the author’s words are so important that you cannot alter anything.

Quotes are often not needed in a summary, since you are shortening the author’s entire passage. In critiques, quotations are more common, since you, as the writer, are breaking down the entire passage and presenting your thoughts on it. The reader needs to know which part of a passage you are referring to. Quotes make clear the exact words you are talking about in a particular part of your critique.

Quotations appear most often in research papers, where the author’s exact words help to define important terms and concepts. The author’s credentials also lend credibility to your argument. They show that an expert on the topic supports what you are saying, and helps to convince the reader of your position.

Using Quotation Marks for Words Meant as Words

Use quotation marks when you refer to a word as a word, when you include the English translation of a word or phrase, or when you want to indicate sarcasm or irony.

Examples: Words meant as words:

Many people confuse the spelling of “comma” and “coma.”

The word “purple” doesn’t usually apply to fish.

Examples: Including the English translation of a word or phrase:

The phrase *carpe diem* means, “seize the day.”

Examples: Indicating sarcasm or irony:

Her “promotion” was actually an invitation to work longer hours.

Oh yeah, she’s an “expert” all right.

Practice Questions

1. Place quotations at the appropriate places in this short clip.

I was just walking along, said Hector, and then this guy told me, Hey, listen up, and so I turned to him and said what?

This made Terrell interested. What did you do after that? he asked. Terrell wanted to know more about this encounter.

Hector was happy that someone finally wanted to know about his trouble. I just walked away at first, he explained, but then he yelled GET BACK OVER HERE!

2. Remove the quotations that aren't necessary or are out of place and add them when missing.

Habib, "you weren't being very nice to me," said Mary. "I think that 'when you said hi to me' you used a disrespectful tone, she explained".

Habib got upset about this and told her back "I didn't try to make you mad," I just wanted to say hi and ask you "how were you doing?"

Well, you could have "been 'nicer' about it." Mary told him back.

3. Underline the sentence that uses quotations appropriately.

According to Briar Rabbit, them berries was "extra good today!"

In Keanu Reeves's in-depth book, he states, "I was spiraling down a course of bad events, leading to my bibliography movie, 'Hardball'."

In John Madden's autobiography, I Love Me Some Football, he talks about how the Raiders were, "the toast of the town back in his coaching days."

4. Fix the following errors:

If *tempus fugit* means time flies, then that should be the name for my new parakeet!

Jane said 'Marny cried out "fiddlesticks!" when she burned the "toast".'

Have you ever read the poem The Road less Traveled?

Answers

1. Place quotations at the appropriate places in this short clip.

“I was just walking along,” said Hector, “and then this guy told me, ‘Hey, listen up,’ and so I turned to him and said, ‘what?’”

This made Terrell interested. “What did you do after that?” he asked. Terrell wanted to know more about this encounter.

Hector was happy that someone finally wanted to know about his trouble. “I just walked away at first,” he explained, “but then he yelled, ‘GET BACK OVER HERE!’”

2. Remove the quotations that aren’t necessary or are out of place and add them when missing.

“Habib, you weren’t being very nice to me,” said Mary. “I think that when you said ‘hi’ to me, you used a disrespectful tone,” she explained.

Habib got upset about this and told her back, “I didn’t try to make you mad; I just wanted to say hi and ask you how were you doing?” (Lisa, this could go either way with “hi” or hi, since say hi is like say hello—a verb, no? What do you think? Same with saying how were you doing—could be a direct quote or not.)

“Well, you could have been nicer about it,” Mary told him back. (we don’t ask them to fix the punctuation so add the commas, etc.?)

3. Underline the sentence that uses quotations appropriately.

According to Briar Rabbit, them berries was “extra good today!”

In Keanu Reeves’s in-depth book, he states, “I was spiraling down a course of bad events, leading to my bibliography movie, ‘Hardball’.” (Note: in MLA style, movies are underlined.)

In John Madden’s autobiography, I Love Me Some Football, he talks about how the Raiders were, “the toast of the town back in his coaching days.”

4. Fix the following errors:

If *tempus fugit* means “time flies,” then that should be the name for my new parakeet!

Jane said “Marny cried out ‘fiddlesticks!’ when she burned the toast.”

Have you ever read the poem “The Road less Traveled”?

(note the question mark goes outside of the quote mark since the title of the poem is not The Road Less Traveled?)