# **Quotation Marks by** [**Marko Ticak**](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/author/marko/) **- www.grammarly.com**

* We use quotation marks with direct quotes, with titles of certain works, to imply alternate meanings, and to write words as words.
* Block quotations are not set off with quotation marks.
* The quoted text is capitalized if you’re quoting a complete sentence and not capitalized if you’re quoting a fragment.

### **Do commas and periods go inside or outside quotation marks?**

* Commas and periods always go inside the quotation marks in American English; dashes, colons, and semicolons almost always go outside the quotation marks; question marks and exclamation marks sometimes go inside, sometimes stay outside.

## **When to use quotation marks**

Quotation marks are for when you want to use someone else’s words in your writing. Let’s say you want to write about something you heard your friend say. You could do it like this:

John said, “I really hate when it’s hot outside.”

You can write about the same thing without using the quotation marks, with a couple of changes:

John said he hated when it was hot outside.

The first sentence contains a **direct quote**, a quote in which you report the exact words John used. The second sentence contains an **indirect quote**, which is a paraphrased version of what John said. **Quotation marks are used only with direct quotes.**

This rule isn’t just for speech. If you’re quoting a written source, you should still put the quote between quotation marks unless you plan to paraphrase it.

### **Run-in and block quotations**

Direct quotations come in two different forms: run-in and block. Run-in quotations are shorter and they are formatted the same as the surrounding text. Block quotes are long quotes that are separated from the surrounding text. Usually, they appear as a separate paragraph (or series of paragraphs) with a different font, a change in the line spacing, or a wider margin. In any case, block quotes don’t need quotation marks to set them off from the remaining text, even though they are direct quotes.

And in case you’re wondering just how long a quote needs to get for it to be a block quote, it varies from one style guide to another. If you have to follow a style guide, you should check it for best practices. If you don’t have to follow a style guide, set your own rule (like five lines of text makes a block quotation), and stick to it.

## **Quotation mark rules**

The first rule of using quotations is that once they’re opened, they have to be closed. The person reading your work needs to know where the quote starts and where it ends. But that’s an easy one. What about some trickier quotation mark rules?

### **Quotations and capitalization**

Sometimes, the text inside quotation marks is capitalized, other times it isn’t. Capitalization of the quoted material depends on the material itself—**if you’re quoting a complete sentence, you should start the quote with a capital letter**, even if the quote is placed in the middle of a sentence:

The exact phrase she used was “There is no way we will get there in time.”

**If you’re quoting a phrase or a part of a sentence, don’t start the quote with a capital letter**:

He called them “loud, smelly, and utterly annoying,” and he closed the door.

**If you’re splitting a quote in half to interject a parenthetical, you should not capitalize the second part of the quote**:

“The problem with opinions,” Paula explained, “is that everyone has one.”

### **Quotation marks and other punctuation marks**

Does punctuation go inside or outside quotation marks? This question mostly refers to the sentence-ending punctuation marks—**punctuation marks that introduce a quote are never placed within quotation marks.**

Sentence-ending punctuation is a whole different story. In the United States, the rule of thumb is that **commas and periods always go inside the quotation marks, and colons and semicolons (dashes as well) go outside**:

“There was a storm last night,” Paul said.

Peter, however, didn’t believe him. “I’m not sure that’s exactly what happened.”

Peter was aware of what he called “Paul’s weakness triangle”: he was half deaf, slept like a log, and was prone to lying.

Paul saw an argument coming, so he muttered only “But I saw it”; this was going to be a long night and he didn’t want to start it with a fight.

Question marks and exclamation points have their own rules.

**If they apply to the quoted material, they go within the quotation marks. If they apply to the whole sentence, they go outside it**:

Sandy asked them, “Why do you guys always fight?”

Did the dog bark every time he heard Sandy say “I’m bringing dinner”?

### **Quotes within quotes**

So now you know how to deal with quotation marks and punctuation and capitalization, but what if the quote you want to take already contains quotation marks? This can happen, too. Say you want to write a direct quote in which someone is praising their favorite chapter from one of the Harry Potter books. Would you do it like this?

““The Dementor’s Kiss” is my favorite chapter in the whole series,” Tom said.

It doesn’t work, does it? You might even manage to confuse your word processing program. But if you do it like this, everything will look much better:

“‘The Dementor’s Kiss’ is my favorite chapter in the whole series,” Tom said.

## **Other uses of quotation marks: titles of short works, words as words, scare quotes**

Besides setting off other people’s words, quotation marks have a couple of other uses. Depending on the style guide you’re using, you might use quotation marks to emphasize titles of all types of compositions (AP Stylebook), or just short compositions (most of the other style guides). [Titles](https://www.grammarly.com/handbook/mechanics/italics-and-underlining/1/italics-and-underlining-titles-of-works/) of books, albums, magazines, newspapers, and other standalone and bigger bodies of work are usually italicized. Poems, chapters, articles—smaller bodies of work, or bodies of work which form a larger body of work—are emphasized by using quotation marks.

You can also use quotation marks to signify words used as words. For example: “inhale” means to take a breath. The quotation marks show that you’re talking about the word itself, not the action of inhaling. However, you’ll often hear that it’s better to italicize words used as words rather than put them in quotation marks—different style guides might prescribe different rules.

Some writers put quotes around words they want to distance themselves from. Quotation marks used this way are commonly called scare quotes or shudder quotes. It’s a way of implying that you’re using a term in an unusual way or that you don’t necessarily approve of it:

This article was written by a “professional” writer.

Scare quotes are sort of like air quotes, and if you know anything about air quotes, you know that they should be used in moderation. The same applies to scare quotes.

You might see quotation marks used instead of [parentheses](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/parentheses-and-brackets/) for translations. So you can write translations like this:

She told him *bonjour* (good day) when they met.

But you can also do it like this:

She told him *bonjour*, “good day,” when they met.

## **Single quotation marks**

We’ve already mentioned that single quotation marks can be used for quotes within quotes. But that’s not all they can do—they can also be used instead of parentheses for translations, but in that case, they don’t have to be separated by commas:

She told him *bonjour* ‘good day’ when they met.

Highly specialized terms in certain fields can also be written within single quotation marks:

Many scholars still argue about Lacan’s ‘desire’ and its implications.

You can also see single quotation marks instead of double quotation marks in headlines of newspaper articles. And of course, all of these rules apply to American English—single vs. double quotation marks is a whole different story in British English.