

## Parentheses: Information Aside

Parentheses aren't used often in fiction, and probably for good reason. They often contain information that (if important enough) should be in the work itself.

Parentheses have four uses:

1. To enclose explanatory material in a sentence when it has no essential connection to the rest of the sentence:  
The girls (who are between 8 and 12) are in a play.  
I will get that project done by tomorrow (December 1).
2. To enclose sources of information in a sentence:  
Chapter 1 (pages 1-19) is crucial to your understanding.  
The scope of work (see Attachment A) details the project deliverables.
3. Around numbers or letters that show subdivisions in a sentence:  
Under the Miranda rights, you have: (1) the right to remain silent; (2) anything you say can and will be used against you; (3) if you can't afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you.
4. Around figures that repeat a number:  
Dinner cost forty dollars and ten cents (\$40.10).  
You have thirty (30) days to pay.

Some basic rules:

1. If the parenthetical phrase closes the sentence, put the punctuation outside.  
I don't like this part of my job (you know what I mean).
2. Do not capitalize the first word of the parenthetical phrase unless it starts with the proper noun "I".  
I quit (and this time I mean it)!  
I quit (I mean it this time)!
3. Only use a question mark or exclamation point inside the parentheses if the parenthetical phrase is at the end of the sentence, and the sentence would otherwise end with a different punctuation mark.  
He spit on the director (can you imagine that?).
4. If the parenthetical phrase is a separate sentence, capitalize the first word and put the punctuation inside the closing parenthesis with no punctuation outside it.  
We interviewed Terrance Jordan today. (Didn't you work with him before?) I think we'll hire him.

One word of warning: no wrylies allowed! Wrylies are used in scriptwriting, and shouldn't find their way into fiction. They are parentheticals that tell the actor what to do, or how to look, and we know that "telling" is a no-no (with scorn and a wagging finger).