

Quotation Marks: Not Just for Dialogue

Many fiction writers associate quotation marks with dialogue only. Sometimes you use double quotation marks, and at other times you use single quotation marks.

Here are nine guidelines:

1. To enclose all parts of a direct quote:
“This is great,” Mr. Smith said, “because you completed the entire assignment.”

2. To enclose quoted words or phrases in a sentence:
Ben Franklin said, “Early to bed, early to rise.”

However, use single quotation marks when you are enclosing a quotation within a quotation:

“When I asked John why he was so successful, he said, ‘Early to bed, early to rise,’” Kate explained.

3. To enclose the titles of short works of music and poetry:
“Yellow Submarine”
“The Raven”
4. Around the titles of lectures, sermons, magazine articles, chapters in a book:
“The Revolution” in *The New Yorker* discusses change in America.
The first chapter of his book is called, “Why I Write.”
5. To enclose a word or phrase explained or defined by the rest of the sentence:
To “redline” a contract means to change it.
An “antecedent” is a noun or noun phrase that a pronoun refers to.
6. To enclose a technical term in nontechnical writing:
In order to get out of the computer screen, hit the “esc” key in the upper left hand corner of the keyboard.
7. To enclose slang, irony, or well-known expressions:
John finally admitted he screwed up; “ain’t that the truth.”
Grandpa doesn’t know what “lol” means.
8. Before the beginning of each stanza of a quoted poem and after the last:
“Roses are red
Violets are blue”
9. Before each paragraph of continuous quoted material and after the last paragraph:
“There are three things you should do in a fire:
First, stop. That means don’t run.
Second, drop. Fall to the ground.

Third, roll. Roll around to put out the fire.”

Punctuation with quotation marks isn't tricky at all:

Commas and periods are placed inside closing quotation marks:

“You stay here,” she said, “and I'll return in twenty minutes.”

Question marks and exclamation points are inside the closing quotation marks if they belong to the quotation:

“What are you watching?” she asked.

“Run faster!” he yelled.

But go outside if they don't:

I'm wondering if she'll ever say, “I do”?

I wish he would quit saying, “You're okay”!

Semicolons and colons are outside the closing quotation marks:

I told them, “I'll leave in five minutes”; but I left in twenty minutes.

“Live life to its fullest”: that's my mantra.

Quotation marks are used the most with dialogue. As you can see, whether they are single or double, they do have other places in writing.