Punctuating Quotations

Properly introducing and punctuating quotations shows where your own words end and the words of another person (a quote) begin. Here are a few punctuation rules to remember when including quotations in your own work.

Introducing a Quote

1) **COLONS**: When you use colons to introduce quotes, you must have a complete sentence preceding the colon.

   Example: Arthur Miller shows his character’s resistance to change in the first act: “They don’t need me in New York. I am the New England man. I’m vital in New England.”

2) **COMMAS**: When you use an introductory or explanatory phrase (NOT a complete sentence) to introduce a quote, use a comma.

   Example: Thoreau directly states his purpose for going into the woods when he says, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately.”

3) **NO PUNCTUATION**: When you make the quotation part of your own sentence without using any introductory phrases to do so, you do not need to use any punctuation before the quote. (In other words, if neither rule 1 nor 2 apply, do NOT use any punctuation to introduce the quote!)

   Example: Burk suggests that evil will prevail if “good men do nothing.”

Ending a Quote

1) **INSIDE THE QUOTE**: When you need to end a quote with either a comma to connect it to the rest of your sentence or a period to end the sentence entirely, place the comma or period INSIDE the quotation marks, not outside.

   Example: As our mother liked to remind us, “a penny saved is a penny earned.”

   Example: Although I know “the path to Hell is paved in adverbs,” I can’t resist wildly throwing one or two into every sentence I write.

2) **OUTSIDE THE QUOTE**: Only place the end period outside the quotation mark when citing the quote with parenthetical citations (both in MLA and APA styles).

   Example: Faulkner suggests the townspeople know what is coming when he writes, “She will kill herself; and we said it would be the best thing” (671).

   Example: I live by the motto, “Nothing in life is to be feared; it is only to be understood” (Curie, 1882, p.12).
Adjusting a Quote

1) **BRACKETS:** If you need to add your own words in the middle of a quote to make it fit into your paper, use brackets to indicate what you have added.

   Example: The teacher indicated that he “would like to provide financial assistance [to every student], but he simply doesn’t have the resources.”

2) **ELLIPSES:** If you need to condense a quote by skipping over sections of it, use ellipses in place of the parts you take out.

   Example: The text goes on to describe aliens dressed “in parkas, space bugs in tutus...and robots in snow boots.”

3) **[SIC]:** If you notice an error in the quote you are citing, you should keep that error in the quote when you include it in your paper. Just put the abbreviation “sic” in brackets right next to the error to indicate that the original author made the mistake, not you.

   Example: As Doe suggests, there are simply “too many metaphor [sic] in this poem.”

Special Cases

1) **QUOTES WITHIN QUOTES:** Anytime you quote a line that already has quotation marks within it, place double quotation marks at the beginning and end of the full quote, and place single quotation marks around the interior quote.

   Example: Smith reminds readers to “remember the phrase ‘the early bird gets the worm’ when deciding what time to go to bed every night” (16).

2) **BLOCK QUOTATIONS:** When you cite a quotation that is more than 4 lines of prose or 3 lines of verse (in MLA format) or that contains 40 words or more (in APA format), place the quote in block format by starting it on a new line, indenting the whole thing, and dropping the quotation marks. (Also note that block quotes are the ONLY type of quotes that require you to put the period before rather than after the parenthetical citation)

   Example:

   Jones’ (1990) study found the following:

   Students often had difficulty using APA style, especially when it was their first time citing sources. This difficulty could be attributed to the fact that many students failed to purchase a style manual or to ask their teacher for help. (p. 199)