Quotation Marks

• Use quotation marks when you are directly quoting a person’s words, spoken or written.

“A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson.

However, do not use quotation marks when paraphrasing.

Ralph Waldo Emerson believed that consistency for its own sake is the mark of a small mind.

• Use quotation marks in dialogue, but also begin a new paragraph to mark the change in speaker.

“Hello,” she said coyly. “My name is Miranda, and this is my German Shepherd, Fluffy.”

“Hi,” he replied. He glanced down at the dog. “Hi, err, Fluffy.”

• Prose quotations more than four typed lines should be blocked (indented one inch from the left margin). These block quotes are typically introduced by a sentence ending with a colon.

As Desmond Morris explains, personal space varies among cultures:

When you are talking to someone in the street or in any open space, reach out with your arm and see where the nearest point of his body comes. If you hail from western Europe, you will find that he is at roughly fingertip distance from you. In other words, as you reach out, your fingertips will just about make contact with his shoulder. If you come from eastern Europe you will find that you are standing at “wrist distance.” If you come from the Mediterranean region you will find that you are much closer to your companion.

• Poetry quotations more than three typed lines are also indented one inch, with no quotation marks.

Although many anthologizers “modernize” her punctuation, Emily Dickinson relied heavily on dashes, using them, perhaps, as a musical device. Here, for example, is the original version of the opening stanza from “The Snake”:

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides- -
You may have met Him- -did you not
His notice sudden is- -
• Use single quotation marks to enclose a quotation within a quotation.

   According to Paul Elliott, Eskimo hunters “chant an ancient magic song to the seal they are after: ‘Beast of the sea! Come and place yourself before me in the early morning!’”

• Use quotation marks for titles of short works:

- Newspaper and magazine articles
- Poems
- Short stories
- Songs
- Episodes of television and radio programs
- Chapters and subdivisions of books

Do not use quotation marks for longer works—book titles, plays, web sites, television and radio programs, films, magazines, and newspapers. These are denoted by italics.

• Quotation marks can be used to set off words used as words, but italics can be used as well.

    The words “accept” and “except” are frequently confused.
    Or
    The words accept and except are frequently confused.

• Periods and commas go inside quotation marks, colons and semicolons outside.

• Question marks and exclamation points are inside unless they apply to the sentence as a whole.

    Contrary to tradition, bedtime at my house is marked by, “Mommy. Can I tell you a story now?”

    Have you heard the old proverb “Do not climb the hill until you reach it”?

• The introduction of a quotation can be done by a colon at the end of a preceding sentence.

• Do not use quotation marks to draw attention to familiar slang, to disown trite expressions, or to justify an attempt at humor.

    Between Thanksgiving and Super Bowl Sunday, many American wives become football widows.

NOT

    Between Thanksgiving and Super Bowl Sunday, many American wives become “football widows.”
• Do not use quotation marks around indirect quotations.

   After leaving the scene of the domestic quarrel, the officer said that he was due for a coffee break.

   NOT

   After leaving the scene of the domestic quarrel, the officer said that he was “due for a coffee break.”

• Do not use quotation marks around the title of your own essay.