

PUNCTUATING CONVERSATION

Quotation marks began in ancient Greek texts as two curved lines that represented the lips of a person speaking. One curved line was placed at the beginning, as if the writer were saying, “I’m telling you something someone else said.” The other curved line came at the end, to say, “I’ve finished writing the words that came out of the other person’s mouth.”

- **Quotation marks are placed before the first word of a quote and after the punctuation that follows the last word.**

EX: The teacher said, “In this class there will be no talking, chewing, breathing, unnecessary eye movements, or tap dancing.”

- **A quoted remark begins with a capital letter: it’s the speaker’s first word.**

EX: I questioned, “Are you up on the furniture again, you bad dog?” She was driving me crazy. I hollered, “Get down now!”

- **A quote is separated from the “he said” part or explanatory phrase with a *comma* OR a *question mark* OR an *exclamation point*, but *never* with a period. A period would create two sentences and a full stop.**

EX: “I just finished reading *I Am the Cheese*,” she remarked.

“So what did you think of it?” I asked.

“It was excellent!” she effused.

I agreed, “I loved it, too.”

Note: The punctuation that follows a quoted remark belongs inside the closing quotation marks. It’s part of the sentence and shows *how* the speaker said what he or she said. Also note that the first word of the explanatory phrase is *not* capitalized when it follows the quote: “Beggin’ Strips® are my favorite snack,” she said.

- **In writing dialogue—two or more people having a conversation—begin a new paragraph *each time* you alternate or change speakers.**

EX: “I wish today were Friday,” she said. “I’ve been looking forward to it for months now.”

“How come?” he asked.

“Because finally, *finally*, I’m supposed to get my braces taken off. At least that’s what my orthodontist promised.”

AN EDITING EXERCISE: PUNCTUATING AND PARAGRAPHING DIALOGUE

Within five minutes the snow was falling so hard we couldn't see the streetlights. I went into full panic mode. Where was my father? My mother said don't worry—he's a good driver. He'll be okay. Do you really think so I asked. Yes I do she said. She put her arm around me and hugged me close to her. Together we stood at the window and watched the storm. Have you ever seen it snow like this before I asked like it will never stop? My mother waited a moment before she answered. Never she said never.