

**Mount Saint Vincent University**  
**Writing Resource Centre**

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**Handout Topic: Quotation Marks**

**What are quotation marks?**

Quotation marks are marks of punctuation that appear in pairs (“word”), and can also appear as single quotation marks (‘word’). Quotation marks are used to indicate text borrowed from another source, certain titles and definitions, and spoken language (dialogue). For more information about using quotations effectively in essays, please see the handout “Using Research Effectively.”

Quotation marks are used to indicate material that is borrowed from another source. It is essential that material taken word-for-word from another source is marked with quotation marks. It is also important to properly cite quoted material (as shown in the example below); if you are unsure about how to do this, seek guidance from the Writing Resource Centre or from your instructor. Notice also that in the example below, the capitalization is maintained in the quoted passage even though a capital would not normally appear in the middle of a sentence. Capitals are always maintained

**e.g.** According to *The Scribner Handbook for Writers*, “**B**ecoming a good writer depends on your becoming a good reader and thinker” (DiYanni and Hoy 2).

Quotation marks are also used to indicate the titles of articles, songs, short stories, poems, television and radio episodes, and sections and chapters of books. The titles of longer works, such as books, newspapers, magazines, plays and albums, are placed in italics.

**e.g.** The Rolling Stones even played one of their classic hits, “Start Me Up.”

**e.g.** T.S. Eliot’s poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” is one of his most well-known.

Quotations are also sometimes used around a word or term that is functioning ironically. Words that are being referred to in a sentence as words can also be placed in quotation marks (italics are also acceptable in this case). Definitions can be placed in quotation marks also, but the use of italics is more common in such cases.

**e.g.** Roger’s “light snack” consisted of a sandwich, pasta and sauce, a salad, an apple, and a granola bar. (“light snack” being used in an ironic fashion)

Finally, quotation marks are used to indicate spoken language (dialogue).

**e.g.** “My name is Diana,” she began. “I am pleased to meet you.”

**e.g.** “We covered this section of the textbook last month,” the professor said. “Does anyone have any questions now that the exam is coming up?”

### Quotes within quotes

Quotations within quotations are noted by using single quotation marks (i.e. ‘quoted material’). If the quote within the quote appears at the end of the sentence, then remember to include all three quotation marks.

**e.g.** “Today we will be analyzing the popular rock song ‘Hotel California,’” our professor announced.

### Punctuating around quotation marks

Periods and commas go *inside* quotation marks, regardless of how the quotation marks are being used (one notable exception: when a citation follows a quotation, the period always come *after* the citation). On the other hand, colons and semicolons always go *outside* quotation marks.

**e.g.** “Never eat yellow snow,” she said. “That’s a lesson I learned the hard way.”

**e.g.** Their motto was “all for one and one for all”; it never seemed to work the way they thought it would.

Exclamation marks and question marks go outside quotation marks if the mark applies to the sentence as a whole. If the question or exclamation mark applies only to the quotation, then it goes inside the quotation marks.

**e.g.** Did you read the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper”? (question mark applies not just to quoted portion, but to entire sentence)

**e.g.** “Why weren’t you there?” he asked. (question mark applies to quoted material only)

### Altering quotations

Sometimes a small piece of a larger quotation may all that is required. On the other hand, a quotation may sometimes require a slight alteration to make it grammatically correct in the sentence at hand. Ellipses (...) are used to indicate omissions from quotations, while square brackets are used to indicate alterations to the quoted material. Altering quotations should only be done where absolutely necessary, and should never result in the original meaning of the quotation becoming lost or changed (the omission of “good” from the second example below might qualify as such a case where the original meaning has been lost).

**e.g.** According to *The Scribner Handbook for Writers*, to become a good writer, you need to “becom[e] a good reader and thinker” (DiYanni and Hoy 2).

**e.g.** According to *The Scribner Handbook for Writers*, “Becoming a ... writer depends on your becoming a good reader and thinker” (DiYanni and Hoy 2).

**Exercises:** Place quotation marks where necessary in the following sentences.

1. Anna’s poem The Lilly won the school prize for excellence in writing.
2. “Many among you have heard the phrase choose your battles, but how many of you actually follow this advice?”
3. “She can’t swim! screamed the man.
4. “Have you looked at the Mansfield story we were supposed to read for today, The Garden Party?”