

Using Quotation Marks Correctly

1. Commas and periods are always placed inside the quotation mark.

- John hates Shakespeare and can't wait for the class to be over: "What a total waste of my time," he whispers to his classmate.
- As John explains it, "Shakespeare is a boring dead guy who is totally lame."
- John told me that *Romeo and Juliet* made him "depressed."
- Modern poems, like T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men," are a pleasure to read.

Exception: When using in-text citations, your period or comma will go **outside** the quotation mark and parenthetical.

- "The Dead," a short story in James Joyce's *Dubliners*, depicts a man coming to terms with his own mortality: "His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead"(176).
- In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield is happy that his brother "just got a Jaguar"(3), for his brother is going to pick him up in it next month.

2. Question marks, exclamation marks, semicolons, and colons go inside the quotation mark if they belong to the original quotation.

- Jay Leno asked such a strange question last night: "Where is the state of New York?"

This is Jay Leno's original question, so the question mark would go BEFORE the quotation mark.

- Hamlet is referring to a dagger when he asks himself why don't I just kill myself "With a bare bodkin?"(3.1.84).

When quoting an original question, keep the question mark in the text to show that it was a question originally. Add a period AFTER the parenthetical.

- After our car was rear ended, my dad screamed, "What an idiot driver!" Here, the dad did yell, so the exclamation is part of the quote; hence, the exclamation point is placed BEFORE the quotation mark.

3. Question marks, exclamation marks, semicolons, and colons go outside the quotation mark if they do not belong to the original quote and are added by you.

- After our car was rear ended, I could not believe my dad only whispered, “Oh, darn”!

This exclamation was created by the writer, and not by the dad –the dad only “whispered,” but the speaker is in disbelief, and adds emphasis to his statement with an exclamation, which needs to be placed AFTER the exclamation point.

- As Bob notes in his report, “Water is a good thing to have around”; these are such simple words with an important message.

The semicolon is placed AFTER the quotation mark because there was no semicolon in Bob’s report. It was added so that a separate comment could be made after the quote.

- I wonder why President Bush calls himself an “American cowboy”: he doesn’t wear a cowboy hat very often.

If you want to express your own thoughts after quoting material by using a colon, then make sure to put the colon AFTER the quotation mark to show that the colon was not a part of the original quote.

- What is the meaning of the Beatles’ lyrics, “Happiness is a warm gun”?

This is a question that has been created out of a non-question statement; therefore, the question mark would be placed AFTER the quotation mark.