

WRITER'S TOOLKIT



Punctuating Dialogue & How to Use Apostrophes

1. Quotation marks tell the reader that a set of words is spoken. In fiction, spoken words are called dialogue. One pair of marks begins the dialogue; another pair ends it. In nonfiction, use the same rules that apply to dialogue in fiction to indicate a quotation from another source.

“This is where the quotation marks go,” said Valerie

2. Words that identify the speaker are called tag lines, or cues. They are not a part of the dialogue and do not belong within the quote marks,

Jennifer asked,
the tag line

“How do I use quotation marks?”
the dialogue

3. Punctuation at the end of the dialogue belongs inside the quotation marks.

“Who’s driving us home?” Elizabeth asked.

“Mom will pick us up at four o’clock,” Mickey replied.

Elizabeth protested, “Her car isn’t big enough to hold all this stuff.”

4. When the tag line comes first, use a comma before the quote.

Kelly asked, “What’s rustling in those bushes?”

5. When the tag line comes after the quote, end it with a period.

“Do you think it’s a bear?” she asked with a shiver.

6. When the tag line interrupts a one-sentence quotation, set it off with commas.

“Okay, it’s not a bear,” she whispered. “Then what is it?”

7. Start a new paragraph each time the speaker changes.

Kelly wailed, “I don’t know!”
“Hush!” Mom said.

8. Dialogue with a tag line makes a single sentence. A sentence cannot have two periods. Use a comma to end the dialogue when the tag line comes last, unless the dialogue is a question or an exclamation. See the examples above.

9. When dialogue is preceded by action, use a period before beginning dialogue.

Susan rose from her chair. “I won’t do it.”

HOW TO USE THE APOSTROPHE

Rules to Remember

1. An apostrophe with an s at the end of a noun shows possession, or ownership. Add ‘s’ to nouns not ending in s. Add the apostrophe only to nouns ending in s.

Jacque’s computer
Louis’ computer
The best music is from the 80s.

2. Use no apostrophe in possessive pronouns: its, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs.

3. Use an apostrophe also to show that letters have been left out when two words have been joined together to make a contraction.

Don’t, shouldn’t, can’t, would’ve, I’ve

EXAMPLES

1. Possession

SINGULAR

dog's collar
mother's job
William's lunch
child's toy
lady's coat
sheep's fleecy coat
The book is hers.

PLURAL

dogs' collars
mothers' jobs
the Williamses' house
children's toys
ladies' coats
sheep's fleecy coats
The book is theirs. Its binding is worn. (Note that Its is not a contraction; no apostrophe is used.)

2. Contractions

can & not = can't
it & is = it's

she & will = she'll
they & are = they're

For further discussion, *The Essentials of English* and/or the *Elements of Style* are excellent resources, covering the rules of English grammar and writing style.

CAN YOU CORRECT THIS?

Heres Lisas lunch. Shes forgotten it again. Its a shame. Shell be hungry and borrow Jeffs. Take it in its bag to her, please?

