Quotation marks are primarily used to represent exact language taken from another source. Knowing how to use quotation marks correctly will help you properly cite sources and avoid plagiarism. This handout will teach you how to correctly use quotation marks.

Direct Quotations

Use quotation marks when you are using someone else’s exact words.

Capitalization of Quotations

When the quoted material is a complete sentence, make sure to capitalize the first word of the quote.

Example: The commencement speaker told the graduating class, “Pursue your dreams and the money will follow.”

Do not capitalize the first word if the quote is not a complete sentence.

Example: The speaker urged the students to “make a difference.”

When the quotation is interrupted, do not capitalize the second part of the quote.

Example: “Be proud of your accomplishment,” said the speaker, “but remember that your education never ends.”

When a quotation is interrupted, but the second part is a full sentence, begin a new sentence and capitalize the quote.

Example: “Be proud of your accomplishment,” said the speaker. “Always remember, however, the lessons you learned along the way.”

Punctuation of Quotations

Place periods and commas within quotation marks.

Example: “Look deep into nature,” Einstein once said, “and then you will understand everything better.”

Place colons and semicolons outside quotation marks.

Example: There are several keys to “thinking outside the box”: asking unorthodox questions, challenging conventional wisdom, and devising creative solutions to problems.
Question marks and exclamation points go inside the quotation marks if they are part of the quote and outside if they are not.

**Example:** My friend asked, “What movie do you want to see?”

**Example:** Did he really say, “We should all see Gravity”?

Parenthetical citations are placed after the quotation marks. The period goes after the parentheses.

**Example:** “Neanderthals have an undeserved reputation for brutishness” (Jones, 2013, p. 5).

**Errors within Quotations**

When the quoted material contains a spelling or grammatical error, transcribe the quotation as it is written, and then enclose the word “sic” in brackets directly after the mistake. “Sic” is a Latin word meaning “thus.”

**Example:** The cat was pleased to announce, “I can has cheezburger [sic].”

**Omitted or Added Material**

When omitting material from a quotation, use an ellipsis.

**Example:** Lincoln said, “But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate . . . this ground.”

Sometimes it is necessary to add information to a quotation. To do so, enclose the added material in brackets.

**Example:** “They [the students] are very smart,” said the teacher.

**Quotations within Quotations**

Use single quotation marks to enclose quotations within quotations.

**Example:** “My parents call my idea a ‘pie in the sky’ scheme,” said the entrepreneur, “but I think I will make a lot of money.”

**Long Quotations**

Set off long quotations by indenting; this is called a block quotation. Quotation marks are not necessary, but the quotation should be introduced by a sentence ending with a colon.

**Example:** Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech contained these immortal words:

> I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.” I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

Style guides differ in their guidelines for block quotations, so be sure to check the manual of the style you are using.
Paraphrasing
Paraphrasing involves reporting another person’s ideas but writing them in your own words. Do not use quotation marks when paraphrasing. Remember that even when you are not using direct quotations, it is still important to cite your source.

Example: According to Jones (2012), Neanderthals are not the brutish creatures we once imagined.

Note: For more information on paraphrasing, please see our “Incorporating Sources” handout.

Discussing Individual Words
Use quotation marks around a word if you are discussing the word itself.

Example: “Spork” is a word made from two other words: “spoon” and “fork.”

Ironic Usage of Words
Quotation marks can be used to enclose words used ironically.

Irony: The “revolution” turned out to be short-lived, dissipating within weeks.

Since quotations marks are used to indicate irony, do not use them for emphasis. Use italics instead.

Irony (Fish is not fresh): I had some “fresh” fish for dinner.

Emphasis (Fish is really fresh): I had some fresh fish for dinner.

Titles of Works
Use quotation marks with titles of short works (e.g., articles, poems, songs).