

# Rules for Punctuating Dialogue

When a person's exact words are used in writing, quotation marks show where the quotation begins and ends. It is simple to put quotation marks before and after a quotation. Problems sometimes arise when other marks of punctuation are used with quotation marks. Follow the rules below to help you correctly punctuate written dialogue.

1. Use quotation marks to enclose a direct quotation - a person's exact words.

*Example:*

INDIRECT QUOTATION: John asked Sue for help with the laundry.

DIRECT QUOTATION: John asked, "Can you help me with the laundry, Sue?"

2. A direct quotation begins with a capital letter.

*Example:* "Sure, I'll help you fold the laundry," Sue said.

3. When a quoted sentence is divided into two parts by an interrupting expression, the second part begins with a small letter.

*Example:* "Gosh," Sue said, "there sure are a lot of towels to fold."

4. A period or comma following a quotation should be placed inside the closing quotation marks.

*Example:* "Thanks for all your help," John told Sue.  
Sue said, "No problem, John."

5. A question mark or an exclamation point should be placed inside the closing quotation marks if the quotation is a question or an exclamation. Otherwise, it should be placed outside the quotation marks.

*Example:* "Would you like help again with your laundry next week?" asked Sue.

*Example:* John said, "Yes!"

6. When you write dialogue (conversation), begin a new paragraph every time the speaker changes.

*Example:*

"I'm looking forward to helping you next week with the laundry," Sue told John.

"Great! I can use your extra help," John replied.

"Okay. I'll see you Saturday at 3 o'clock," Sue said as she waved goodbye and left for home.

7. Use single quotation marks to enclose a quotation within a quotation.

*Example:*

"Did your mom really say, 'Yes, Sue, it's okay if you help John with his laundry each Saturday'?" asked John.