

Punctuation Use With Quotations

Combining quotation marks with other punctuation marks can be confusing. You should consult a style manual for complicated situations, but the following rules apply to most cases.

1. Commas and periods appear within quotation marks when your citation style involves superscript footnotes or endnotes (e.g., Chicago style).

According to Professor Poe, werewolves “represent anxiety about the separation between human and animal,” and werewolf movies often “interrogate those boundaries.”¹

2. In-text citations precede the final period when the quotation is under 40 words; citations of longer quotations follow different formatting. Check the appropriate style guide for specifics: <https://ubishops.libguides.com/CitationGuides>

According to Professor Poe, werewolves “represent anxiety about the separation between human and animal,” and werewolf movies often “interrogate those boundaries” (Poe 167).

3. Use a comma after a reporting phrase that introduces a quotation.

The politician exclaimed, “The campaign trail has been grueling but ultimately rewarding.”

4. Place all other punctuation marks (colons, semicolons, exclamation marks, question marks) outside the quotation marks unless they are part of the quotation.

How can we expect a planet with finite resources to flourish amidst what Gilbert (2005, p. 4) describes as the “capitalists’ tireless pursuit of profit”?

The coach yelled in disbelief, “That should have been a holding penalty!”

In the first example, the question mark is placed outside the quotation marks because the question is being raised by the writer of the sentence, not the author of the quoted text (Gilbert). In the second example, the exclamation mark remains within the quotation marks because it indicates the excited tone of the coach’s commentary; thus, the exclamation is considered to be part of the original quotation.

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

The reporter told me, “When I interviewed the quarterback, he said they simply ‘played a better game.’”

6. Sometimes the text you wish to quote will not fit grammatically or clearly into your sentence without making some changes to the original wording. Perhaps a pronoun should be replaced with the actual noun to make the context clear, or perhaps the verb tense does not fit. Edit a quotation in the following ways to make it fit grammatically with your own sentence.

Square brackets

To reflect changes or additions to a quotation, place square brackets around any words that you have changed or added for clarity.

"We completely revised our political strategies after the strike [of 1934]."
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When a verb in a quotation does not fit syntactically into your sentence, you may use brackets to change the tense:

Original	"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" (Dickens 5).
Edited	If Charles Dickens were alive today, he would likely say, "It [is] the best of times, it [is] the worst of times."

Ellipses

To show that some text has been removed, use three consecutive periods separated by one space (. . .) to leave out extra or unnecessary words. The ellipses represent information that you are omitting from a quotation. Be sure not to fundamentally change the meaning of the quotation by omitting material.

Original	"The Writing Centre is located in the Library Learning Commons and serves the entire BU community."
Edited	"The Writing Centre . . . serves the entire BU community."

If you excerpt material at the end of a clause that ends in a comma, retain the comma.

Original	"The red car came to a screeching halt that was heard by nearby pedestrians, but no one was hurt."
Edited	"The red car came to a screeching halt . . . , but no one was hurt."

Material quoted from:

¹<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/quotations/>

Material adapted from:

<https://style.mla.org/using-brackets-to-change-tense/>

