

I'm not a robot



this functionality, you can also use keyboard shortcuts. For example: To hold down the alt key, then type the number pad using your number pad: Opening double quote shortcut: alt 0148 Opening single quote shortcut: alt 0145 Opening double quote shortcut: alt 0146 Opening single quote shortcut: alt 0147

you must type these numbers in with your number pad, and not the top row of numbers on your keyboard. The top row will not work. The same process applies here, but the commands are slightly different. With a Mac, hold down the different keys shown here: Opening double quote shortcut: Option + [Closing double quote shortcut: Option + Shift +] Opening single quote shortcut: Option +] Closing single quote shortcut: Option + Shift +] The downside to using the short codes is that it can become extremely tedious, especially if you have to go through your entire book and replace all of the quotes. Thankfully, there is an option to make this a lot easier... When you use Atticus, you can automatically swap your straight quotes for curly quotes with the touch of a button. To do this, look on the top writing toolbar, and you will see two icons on the right. If you click the button labeled "Apply Smart Quotes", it will give you the following pop-up: Do this for each of your chapters, and you should see the little red warning icon change to a green icon, indicating that your entire book is free of straight quotes. This saves you a ton of hassle, it is by far the easiest way to improve your quotes in a writing or formatting program. Check Out Atticus Here We've already talked about the grammatical rules for dialogue tags above, but let's talk a little more about, because there are ways to use dialogue tags that are grammatically correct, but not great from a stylistic standpoint. For example, should you use words other than "said" for your dialogue tag? Technically, you can do this. You can use many words as a dialogue tag. For example: "You like to write books?" asked Lucy. "You like to write books?" snickered Lucy. "You like to write books?" intoned Lucy. In this case, I have used alternative dialogue tags in each example. It's common for newer writers to think that mixing up the dialogue tags like this is a good thing, but this is not the case. In fact, most authors agree the best practice is to use just "said" and "asked". You can use other words on occasion (I sometimes use "clarified", "shouted", or "whispered"), but these should be rare. The reason for this is simple: readers expect to see the words "said" and "asked". Their mind brushes right over it, taking the necessary attribution data, and nothing else. Using "said" over and over again will not seem repetitive, because it is expected. Using unusual dialogue tags is a quick way to draw the reader out of the book. I've talked, briefly, about em-dashes and ellipses above, but there are a few other considerations to make when formatting dialogue interruptions. You can format it in two ways. First of all: "I love writing books," John said, rubbing his hands together. "But I don't like editing them that much." In this first example, you write your starting dialogue, tag, and action as usual, but instead of finishing the sentence with a period, you place a comma, open a new quotation mark and continue the sentence with a conjunction. At the end of that sentence, you'd use a period and close the speech. But you can also format that interruption by separating the spoken pieces into two separate sentences as follows: "I love writing books," John said, rubbing his hands together. "But I don't like editing them that much." Here, the sentence ends after John has rubbed his hands together. Because of that, when you start your new line of dialogue, you format it with a capitalized 'But' and end it with a period. Say your speaker is being erratic, or just doing something that would interrupt his speech, like taking a sip of water or coughing uncontrollably, you wouldn't have a well-planned and inserted interruption. The text would look broken because the dialogue is being broken by the action. You'd format that as follows: "I love writing books"—John took a sip of water—"but I'm not a fan of editing them." Note: The em-dashes are outside of the dialogue for this type of formatting. You might be surprised to learn that there is a best practice for the word order for your dialogue tags. For example, should you say "Lucy said" or "said Lucy"? It may be common for you to guess that "said Lucy" is an acceptable practice (at least I did), but while this is technically grammatically correct, it is actually discouraged. The correct way to format this is "Lucy said". Think of it this way, would it feel more natural to say "she said" or "said she"? Since "she said" is more natural with pronouns, the logic is that "Lucy said" is the superior form of dialogue tag. Instead of dialogue tags, one alternative that you can use are beats. Beats are small actions to give to your characters, so it doesn't sound like the dialogue is being spoken between two talking heads in a void. It helps to move the story along, creates a sense of realism, and gives you a chance to reduce the number of dialogue tags that you use, without confusing the reader. Example: "I love to write books!" John sat at the keyboard and cracked his knuckles. You can also add a beat to your dialogue tag. Example: "I love to write books!" said John, then sat at the keyboard and cracked his knuckles. Additionally, you can use a beat to interrupt the flow of dialogue. This is even encouraged at times, because it can create diversity in how you use your dialogue. Example: "I love to write books!" John sat at the keyboard and cracked his knuckles. "But I don't like editing them as much." When you are formatting internal dialogue (particularly when writing from 3rd person point of view), there are three ways that you can format it. It's common to see inner dialogue treated the same as quoted dialogue, but with the entire inner dialogue italicized instead of using quotation marks. Example: I just love to write books, John thought. Why can't Lucy understand this? Likewise, you can often leave out the tag all together, as the reader is able to understand by the italics that this is a thought. However, you might want to accompany this with a beat. Example: John sat at his desk. I just love to write books. Why can't Lucy understand this? If you are writing from a deeper point of view, you might not need italics or a tag. This is especially common when writing in first-person point of view, where literally all of the prose represents that person's thoughts. Example: I sat at my desk. I just love to write books. Why can't Lucy understand this? In addition to the above, there are a few miscellaneous tips that I would like to share: When using dialogue, you never want the reader to be confused as to who is saying the dialogue. There are a couple of ways to do this. Use dialogue tags effectively Never leave out dialogue tags unless you only have two people, and it is obvious which one is speaking Use beats appropriately Each character should have a unique way of speaking. A good way to practice different voices is to record a conversation, such as around the dinner table, and transcribe it. Notice how everyone uses a different "flow" to our sentences, or have favorite words that I like to use. Do they speak in short, choppy sentences? Or are they more prone to elegant, long-winded paragraphs? Another great exercise is to write a conversation with two people, and don't use dialogue tags. Instead, try to make how they are speaking make it obvious who is actually talking. Despite my recommendation above, it is possible to overdo character voice. Examples of this include: Overdoing a heavy accent, where every word of their dialogue is spelled slightly different to convey the dialect. Including curse words in every other sentence, even if this is realistically based on someone you know. Including a lot of "ums" and "uhs" in your sentence. While these are common in real life, they can dramatically pull your reader out of the story. While it is okay for the character to explain some of what is going on in their dialogue, you have to be careful with this. Above all, make sure your dialogue naturally fits the character in the scene. Info dumping can easily lead to "Maid and Butler dialogue", where it feels like the characters just talking for the benefit of the reader, and not for the actual situation they are in. While it is important to use "said" and "asked" the most when doing your dialogue tags, there are other ways that you should use to diversify your tags, such as: Use beats instead Use dialogue tags before, after, and in the middle of your dialogue Remove dialogue tags when you have a back-and-forth conversation between two people and it is obvious who is saying what This is not just relevant for dialogue tags, but also for your dialogue styles. If you have had three lines of dialogue in a row that all placed your dialogue tag in the middle of the dialogue, then you might want to change things up a bit. While it is easy to get overwhelmed with all of the little tips and tricks to formatting dialogue, once you have enough practice, it becomes second nature. Additionally, a tool like Atticus can make some of the technical bits so much easier, such as changing your street quotes to curly quotes. In addition to formatting dialogue, Atticus is the number one software for writing and formatting a book. Plus, unlike other leading formatting software is, it is available on all platforms, and costs over \$100 less than the leading alternative. Check it Out! Written by Updated June 6, 2025Image descriptionAn illustration of a person speaking while holding a book, perhaps for reference.Image descriptionAn illustration of a person with a pen in hand looking over documents.Frequently asked questionsWhat kinds of writing have dialogue?There are many types of content that use dialogue, including interviews, speeches, poems, short stories and personal essays.How can I write compelling dialogue?To write compelling dialogue, avoid using unnecessary words and try to think about how people really talk. Consider the relationship between your characters when crafting your dialogue, as this can help you avoid making strangers feel close or best friends feel distant.How do you include a quote in an article?There are many ways you can include a quote in your writing, such as:Introduce the quote with a colonStart the sentence yourself and complete it with the quoteUse an introductory phrase followed by a commaWrite a descriptive verb to introduce the quote The information on this site is provided as a courtesy and for informational purposes only. Indeed is not a career or legal advisor and does not guarantee job interviews or offers Quotation marks are used to identify words that someone has said. You'll often find them in fiction, where they signify dialogue, the words spoken by the characters. In newspapers, journalists use quotation marks to signify that something is a direct quote from a person in the article. In academic papers, quotation marks can signify that you are quoting material that was written by someone else. Quotation marks always come in pairs; the first set opens the quote and the second set closes the quote. American vs. British quotation marks American English and British English differ in the way they use quotation marks. American English uses double quotation marks (" ") for quotes and reserves single quotation marks (' ') for quotes within quotes. In British English, the convention is the opposite. Another difference is that in American English, periods and commas go before closing quotation marks. In British English, they go after the closing quotation mark. The guidelines below apply to American English. Here's a tip: Want to make sure your writing shines? Grammarly can check your spelling and save you from grammar and punctuation mistakes. It even proofreads your text, so your work is extra polished wherever you write. Grammarly helps you communicate confidently Dialogue quotation marks When writers become confused about quotation marks, it usually has to do with where to put other nearby punctuation. Below is an example of a conversation between two characters, with their dialogue correctly punctuated. Martin said, "I'm going over to Jennifer's house for a few hours." "You can't be serious!" cried Fauntleroy. "Oh, but I am," Martin replied. "How will you get there?" Fauntleroy asked. "I thought I'd take the bus." "And," Fauntleroy continued, "exactly how long is 'a few hours'?" "Probably two or three." "Well . . . fine. Tell Jennifer I said hello." In the first sentence, Martin makes a declarative statement that ends in a period. The period goes inside the quotation marks. Treat anything within quotation marks as separate from the rest of the sentence you've written, and make sure it has its own correct punctuation. If the quote is a full sentence, it must begin with a capital letter, even though it is within the larger structure of another sentence. The second sentence begins a new paragraph because a different character is speaking. Fauntleroy responds with an outburst, ending with an exclamation mark. When an exclamation mark belongs to the sentence inside the quotation mark, it goes before the closing quotation mark. In the third sentence, Martin is making another declarative statement. This time, however, the statement is followed by the dialogue tag Martin replied. In dialogue, when a sentence that would normally end in a period is followed by a dialogue tag, the period becomes a comma. It should go before the closing quotation mark. In the fourth sentence, Fauntleroy's query ends with a question mark. As with exclamation marks, a question mark goes before the closing quotation mark when it belongs to the sentence inside the quotation marks. In the fifth sentence, Martin is speaking, but there is no dialogue tag. Writers often omit dialogue tags when the context of a conversation makes it clear who the speaker is. In the sixth sentence, the dialogue tag Fauntleroy continued appears in the middle of Fauntleroy's sentence. Notice the placement of the commas after And and continued; commas go before quotation marks. This sentence also contains a quote within a quote, which is enclosed with single quotation marks. Fauntleroy is repeating Martin's words a few hours. The final two sentences of the conversation also omit the dialogue tags, because it's clear which character is speaking in both instances. Non-dialogue quotations In nonfiction or academic contexts, you may want to quote someone without styling it as dialogue. The same rules for where to put other punctuation in relation to the quotation marks apply. But you should also take care to construct your sentence so that the quoted words fit within it grammatically. The mayor said his two golden retrievers were "the best dogs in the world" and added that he was not a cat person. The mayor said his two golden retrievers were "the best dogs in the world. I'm not a cat person." In the second example, the sentence begins in the third person and past tense but abruptly switches to the first person and present tense halfway through the quote. The result is jarring for the reader, and sometimes hard to follow. Scare quotes Occasionally, writers enclose certain terms they wish to distance themselves from in quotation marks. Quotation marks used this way are commonly called scare quotes or shudder quotes. It's a way of implying that you're using a term in an unusual way or that you don't necessarily approve of it. For example: Silicon Valley has fully embraced the "sharing economy." The scare scare quotes usually suggest a sniff of disapproval or sarcasm from the writer, you should never use them purely for emphasis or decoration. A sign outside a restaurant that proclaims Best "Flapjacks" in Town will make people stop and wonder why the flapjacks need the scare quotes. Are they really flapjacks? Or are they some kind of inferior imitation? Likewise, if you write someone a note that says I "love" you, the recipient will probably assume that you meant the exact opposite!

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