

Notes on Writing about Literature: A Brief Guide to Better Writing
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Punctuating Quotations Correctly

I. When Quoting Directly from the Text Inside Your Own Sentences (Without Parenthetical Citations of Author, Year, & Page)

- A. *Commas* and *periods* must be included *inside* the quotation marks, that is, before closing the quotation marks.

Examples: Connie's sister, June, who is **"twenty-four and still live[s] at home,"** is a thorn in Connie's side.

Obviously, Connie does not have a loving relationship with her mother: **"She makes me want to throw up sometimes,' she complained to her friends."**

- B. *Semicolons* and *colons* are always placed *outside* the quotation marks, that is, after closing the quotation marks.

Examples: Flannery O'Connor's **"Good Country People":** The Two Faces of Hulga

(*Ditto* for semicolons; they go outside the quotation marks)

- C. *Question marks* and *exclamation points* belong *inside* the quotation marks if the quotation itself is a question or an exclamation and *outside* the quotation marks if the quotation is part of a sentence that is a question or an exclamation.

Examples: **"Stop gawking at yourself. Who are you? You think you're so pretty?"**

He shouted, **"You're fired!"**

Why does Connie's mother insist that her daughter's **"mind was all filled with trashy daydreams"?**

II. When Quoting Directly from the Text Inside Your Own Sentences and Citing Author, Year, & Page in Parenthesis (APA style)

- A. When citations of author and page are included in parenthesis after the quotation, *commas* and *periods* are placed *after the parenthesis only*, that is, *outside the closed parenthesis*.

Examples: Connie's sister, June, who is **"twenty-four and still live[s] at home"** (Oates, 1966, p. 438), is a thorn in Connie's side.

Obviously, Connie does not have a loving relationship with her mother: **“She makes me want to throw up sometimes,’ she complained to her friends” (Oates, 1966, p. 438).**

- B. On the other hand, question marks and exclamation points *should never be placed outside* a closed parenthesis because they look awkward.

“Stop gawking at yourself. Who are you? You think you’re so pretty?” (Oates, 1966, p. 438).

- C. However, if the case arises, *do place semicolons and colons outside* the closed parenthesis.

Example: **“She couldn’t decide if she liked him or if he was just a jerk” (Oates, 1966, p. 441);** at least this is what Connie thinks.

The same goes for colons.

III. For Set-Off or Blocked Quotations Followed by Parenthetical Citations.

Rule: When you quote more than *four lines* of the original text, the quotations must be blocked or set-off (you indent the entire quotation and do not use quotation marks unless they appear in the original). The punctuation comes wherever it appears in the text, that is, before the parenthetical citation of author, year, and page.

Examples:

To Connie’s mother, June is obviously the favorite daughter:

Connie had to hear her praised all the time by her mother and her mother’s sisters. June did this, June did that, she saved money and helped clean the house and cooked and Connie couldn’t do a thing, her mind was all filled with trashy daydreams. (Oates, 1966, p. 438)

Note: Remember that everything in your paper must be double spaced, and that goes for blocked quotations as well. Please do not put periods in two places. Follow the above rules religiously. In the above examples, I highlighted the places in which the quotations are punctuated. Again, all the above examples deal only with matters of form, with how to punctuate, and not with how to handle evidence.