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## How to have two quotes in one sentence

The use of quotation marks, also called inverted commas, is very slightly complicated by the fact that there are two types: single quotes ( ' ') and double quotes ( " "). As a general rule, British usage has in the past usually preferred single quotes for ordinary use, but double quotes are now increasingly common; American usage has always preferred double quotes. As we shall see below, the use of double quotes in fact offers several advantages, and this is the usage I recommend here. The chief use of quotation marks is quite easy to understand: a pair of quotation marks encloses a direct quotation — that is, a repetition of someone's exact words. Here are some examples: President Kennedy famously exclaimed "Ich bin ein Berliner!" Madonna is fond of declaring "I'm not ashamed of anything." "The only emperor", writes Wallace Stevens, "is the emperor of ice cream." Look closely at these examples. Note first that what is enclosed in quotes must be the exact words of the person being quoted. Anything which is not part of those exact words must be placed outside the quotes, even if, as in the last example, this means using two sets of quotes because the quotation has been interrupted. Consequently, the following example is wrong: "Thomas Edison declared that "Genius was one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration." Here the passage inside the quotes transparently does not reproduce Edison's exact words. There are three ways of fixing this. First, drop the quotes: Thomas Edison declared that genius was one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration. Second, rewrite the sentence so that you can use Edison's exact words: According to Thomas Edison, "Genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration." Third, move the quotes so that they enclose only Edison's exact words: Thomas Edison declared that genius was "one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration". All three of these are perfect, since only Edison's exact words are enclosed in quotes. Now notice something else which is very important: a quotation is set off by quotation marks and nothing else. A sentence containing a quotation is punctuated exactly like any other sentence apart from the addition of the quotation marks. You should not insert additional punctuation marks into the sentence merely to warn the reader that a quotation is coming up: that's what the quotation marks are for. Hence the first two of the following are bad style, and the third one is wrong: \*President Nixon declared, "I am not a crook." \*President Nixon declared: "I am not a crook." \*President Nixon declared:- "I am not a crook." The comma and the colon in the first two are completely pointless, while the startling arsenal of punctuation in the third is grotesque. (Remember, a colon can never be followed by a hyphen or a dash.) Here is the sentence with proper punctuation: President Nixon declared "I am not a crook." Adding more dots and squiggles to this perfectly clear sentence would do absolutely nothing to improve it. No punctuation mark should be used if it is not necessary. On the other hand, the presence of quotation marks does not remove the necessity of using other punctuation which is required for independent reasons. Look again at these examples: According to Thomas Edison, "Genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration." "The only emperor", writes Wallace Stevens, "is the emperor of ice cream." The commas here are bracketing commas, used as usual to set off weak interruptions; their presence has nothing to do with the presence of a quotation, which is itself properly marked off by the quotation marks. Here is another example: Mae West had one golden rule for handling men: "Tell the pretty ones they're smart, and tell the smart ones they're pretty." The colon here is not being used merely because a quotation follows. Instead, it is doing what colons always do: it is introducing an explanation of what comes before the colon. It is merely a coincidence that what follows the colon happens to be a quotation. This last example illustrates another point about quotations: the quotation inside the quote marks begins with a capital letter if it is a complete sentence, but not otherwise. Look once more at two versions of the Edison sentence: According to Thomas Edison, "Genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration." Thomas Edison declared that genius was "one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration". The first quotation is a complete sentence and therefore gets an initial capital letter; the second is not a complete sentence and hence receives no capital. There is one situation in which the use of single quotes instead of double quotes can be rather a nuisance. This is when the quotation contains an apostrophe, especially near the end: Stalin announced defiantly 'Hitler's invasion of Russia will be no more successful than Napoleon's was.' Since an apostrophe is usually indistinguishable from a closing quote mark, the reader may be momentarily misled into thinking that she has come to the end of the quotation when she has not. This is one reason why I personally prefer to use double quotes: Stalin announced defiantly "Hitler's invasion of Russia will be no more successful than Napoleon's was." With double quotes, the problem goes away. Things can get a little complicated when you cite a quotation that has another quotation inside it. In this rare circumstance, the rule is to set off the internal quotation with the other type of quotation marks. So, if you're using double quotes: The Shadow Employment Secretary declared "Describing the unemployment figures as 'disappointing' is an insult to the British people." And if you're using single quotes: The Shadow Employment Secretary declared 'Describing the unemployment figures as "disappointing" is an insult to the British people.' Naturally, you'll be asking what you should do if you have a quotation inside a quotation inside a quotation. My answer: you should rewrite the sentence. Otherwise, you will simply lose your reader in a labyrinth of quotation marks. If you have a long quotation which you want to display indented in the middle of the page, you do not need to place quotes around it, though you should make sure that you identify it explicitly as a quotation in your main text. Here is an example cited from G. V. Carey's famous book on punctuation, *Mind the Stop* (Carey 1956). I should define punctuation as being governed two-thirds by rule and one-third by personal taste. I shall endeavour not to stress the former to the exclusion of the latter, but I will not knuckle under to those who apparently claim for themselves complete freedom to do what they please in the matter. It would not be wrong to enclose this passage in quotes, but there is no need, since I have clearly identified it as a quotation, which is exactly what quotation marks normally do. No punctuation should be used if it's not doing any work. Occasionally you may find it necessary to interrupt a quotation you are citing in order to clarify something. To do this you enclose your remarks in square brackets (never parentheses). Suppose I want to cite a famous passage from the eighteenth-century French writer Alexis de Tocqueville: These two nations [America and Russia] seem set to sway the destinies of half the globe. The passage from which this sentence is taken had earlier made it clear which two nations the author was talking about. My quotation, however, does not make this clear, and so I have inserted the necessary information enclosed in square brackets. Some authors, when doing this, have a habit of inserting their own initials within the square brackets, preceded by a dash. Thus, my example might have looked like this: These two nations [America and Russia — RLT] seem set to sway the destinies of half the globe. This is not wrong, but it is hardly ever necessary, since the square brackets already make it clear what's going on. There is one special interruption whose use you should be familiar with. This happens when the passage you are quoting contains a mistake of some kind, and you want to make it clear to your reader that the mistake is contained in the original passage, and has not been introduced by you. To do this, you use the Latin word *sic*, which means 'thus', again enclosed in square brackets and immediately following the mistake. The mistake can be of any kind: a spelling mistake, a grammatical error, the use of the wrong word, or even a statement which is obviously wrong or silly. Here are some examples, all of which are meant to be direct quotations: We have not recieved [sic] your letter. The number of students are [sic] larger than usual. The All Blacks won the match with a fortuitous [sic] try in the final minute. The last dinosaurs died about 60,000 years ago [sic]. (The word received is misspelled; the form are has been used where is is required; the word fortuitous, which means 'accidental', has been used where fortunate was intended; the last statement is grotesquely false.) Note that the word *sic* is commonly italicized, if italics are available. And note also that *sic* is not used merely to emphasize part of a quotation: it is used only to draw attention to an error. If you do want to emphasize part of a quotation, you do so by placing that part in italics, but you must show that you are doing this. Here is a sentence cited from Steven Pinker's book *The Language Instinct*: Many prescriptive rules of grammar are just plain dumb and should be deleted from the usage handbooks [emphasis added]. Here my comment in square brackets shows that the italics were not present in the original but that I have added them in order to draw attention to this part of the quotation. We shall consider the use of italics further. If you want to quote parts of a passage while leaving out some intervening bits, you do this by inserting a suspension (...) to represent a missing section of a quotation. If, as a result, you need to provide one or two extra words to link up the pieces of the quotation, you put those extra words inside square brackets to show that they are not part of the quotation. If you need to change a small letter to a capital, you put that capital inside square brackets. Here is an example, cited from my own book *Language: The Basics* (Trask 1995): Chelsea was born nearly deaf, but...she was disastrously misdiagnosed as mentally retarded when she failed to learn to speak...[S]he was raised by a loving family...[but] only when she was thirty-one did a disbelieving doctor...prescribe for her a hearing aid. Able to hear speech at last, she began learning English. Note that, after the word *speak* in line two, there are four dots. The reason for this is that the suspension follows a full stop. In this circumstance, British usage usually favours the writing of four dots, while American usage commonly prefers to write only three. You are free to choose, but, as always, be consistent. Naturally, when you use a suspension, be careful not to misrepresent the sense of the original passage. Finally, there remains the problem of whether to put other punctuation marks inside or outside the quotation marks. There are two schools of thought on this, which I shall call the logical view and the conventional view. The logical view holds that the only punctuation marks which should be placed inside the quotation marks are those that form part of the quotation, while all others should be placed outside. The conventional view, in contrast, insists on placing most other punctuation marks inside a closing quote, regardless of whether they form part of the quotation. Here are two sentences punctuated according to the logical view: "The only thing we have to fear", said Franklin Roosevelt, "is fear itself." The Prime Minister condemned what he called "simple-minded solutions". And here they are punctuated according to the conventional view: "The only thing we have to fear," said Franklin Roosevelt, "is fear itself." The Prime Minister condemned what he called "simple-minded solutions." Note the placing of the comma after fear in the first example and of the final full stop in the second. These are not part of their quotations, and so the logical view places them outside the quote marks, while the conventional view places them inside, on the theory that a closing quote should always follow another punctuation mark. Which view should we prefer? I certainly prefer the logical view, and, in a perfect world, I would simply advise you to stick to this view. However, it is a fact that very many people have been taught the conventional view and adhere to it rigorously. Many of these people occupy influential positions — for example, quite a few of them are copy-editors for major publishers. Consequently, if you try to adhere to the logical view, you are likely to encounter a good deal of resistance. The linguist Geoff Pullum, a fervent advocate of the logical view, once got so angry at copy-editors who insisted on reshuffling his carefully placed punctuation that he wrote an article called 'Punctuation and human freedom' (Pullum 1984). Here is one of his examples, first with logical punctuation: Shakespeare's play *Richard III* contains the line "Now is the winter of our discontent". This is true. Now try it with conventional punctuation: Shakespeare's play *Richard III* contains the line "Now is the winter of our discontent." This is strictly false, since the line in question is only the first of two lines making up a complete sentence, and hence does not end in a full stop, as apparently suggested by the conventional punctuation: Now is the winter of our discontent Made glorious summer by this sun of York. The same point arises in the General Sedgwick example: General Sedgwick's last words to his worried staff were "Don't worry, boys; they couldn't hit an elephant at this dist—". Here, putting the full stop inside the closing quotes, as required by the conventionalists, would produce an idiotic result, since the whole point of the quotation is that the lamented general didn't live long enough to finish it. You may follow your own preference in this matter, so long as you are consistent. If you opt for logical punctuation, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are on the side of the angels, but you should also expect some grim opposition from the other side. Copyright © Larry Trask, 1997 Maintained by the Department of Informatics, University of Sussex In an interview article, it's important that readers are never in any doubt as to who said what: is the interviewer (or narrator) speaking, or are these the words of the interviewee? And the problem naturally gets more complex if several people are being interviewed. One of the more subtle ways writers in English guide their readers through an interview is by using punctuation. In this article, we explain and exemplify what to do if a passage quoting the interviewee extends over more than one paragraph. It involves a rule that many native speakers are not consciously aware of, but which journalists, editors and publishers know and apply regularly. When quoting someone in an article, it is normal practice to put quotation marks at the beginning and the end of the quoted remarks. But what do we do when the quotation extends over two (or more) paragraphs? For the sake of illustration, let's assume that we're interviewing someone called Fred about dealing with long quotations. Fred reveals all "In English," says Fred, "a paragraph boundary is a substantial break. It often indicates a change of topic, and is shown visually by a blank line or a line break and indentation. It is at just such a moment that a new speaker might well come into the picture, or that the narrator might resume the story. "It is therefore important that readers don't get confused about who is speaking in the new paragraph — the original speaker, someone new or the narrator?" To solve this problem, both UK and US English have adopted the following technique. To indicate the original speaker is still talking, the first paragraph is left open: no closing quotation marks are placed. To indicate that we are still dealing with quoted material rather than the narrator's prose, quotation marks are placed at the beginning of the second paragraph. "In other words, when dealing with quotations that extend over more than one paragraph, you need to put quotation marks at the beginning of each paragraph but at the end only of the final one."



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