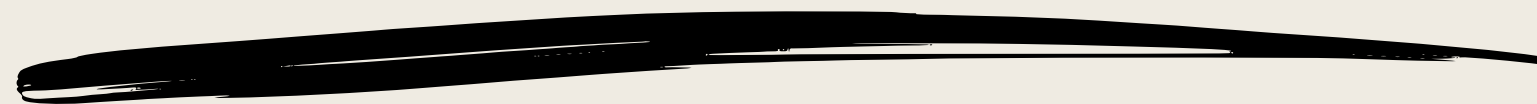
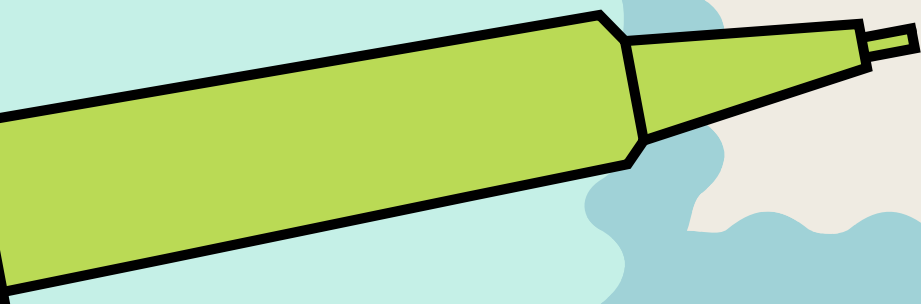
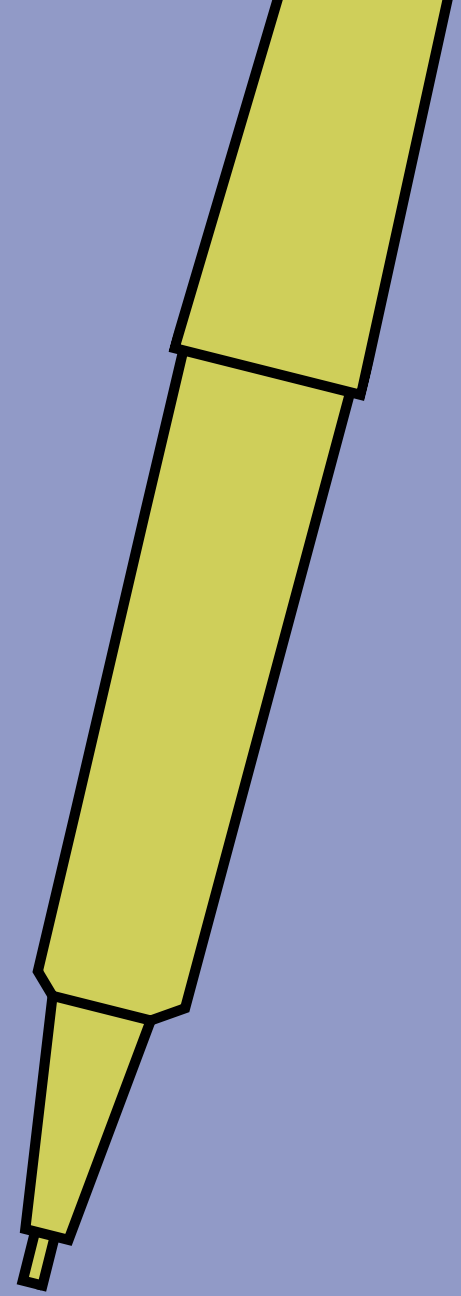


Dialogue Punctuation

What Your Characters and Readers
Wish You Knew





Jeanette the Writer

Professional Editor, Creative Writer,
Recreational Mermaid

Katie Chambers

Professional Editor, Organizational Wizard,
Devoted Mom





Our Goals

Common Vocab

Dialogue Situations





Why Care?

Many copyediting rules are flexible, but
dialogue rules are not

Using punctuation incorrectly risks pulling
the reader out of the story



Common Vocab

Terminal Punctuation

Dialogue Tag

Verb of Utterance

Action Beat



Punctuation

Comma ,

Period .

Em Dash —

Ellipsis . . .

Question Mark ?

Exclamation Mark !

Quotation Mark “

Single Quote ‘

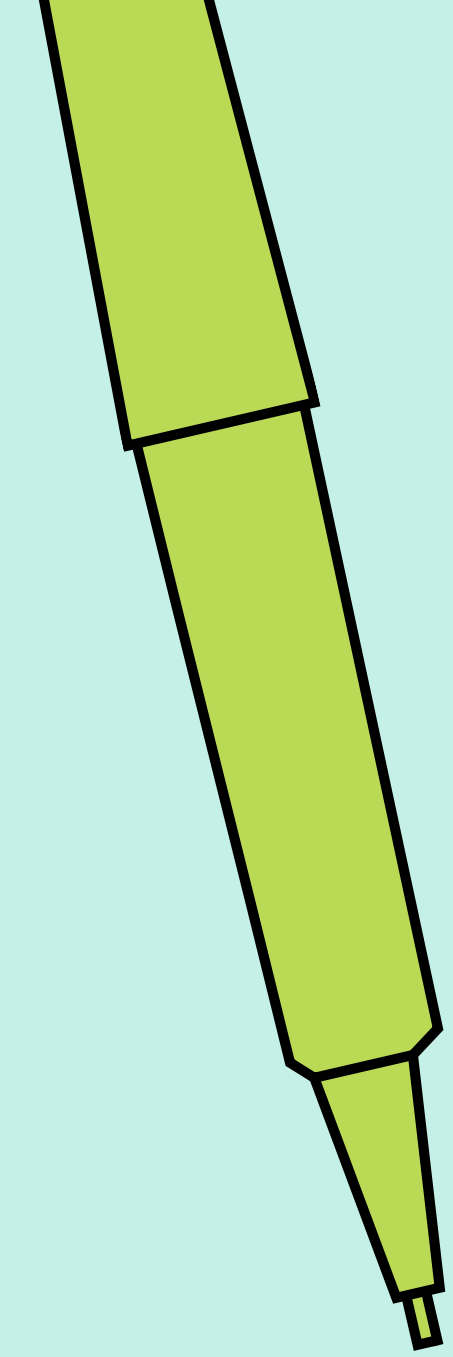


Sources

Chicago Manual of Style
(18th Edition, 2024)



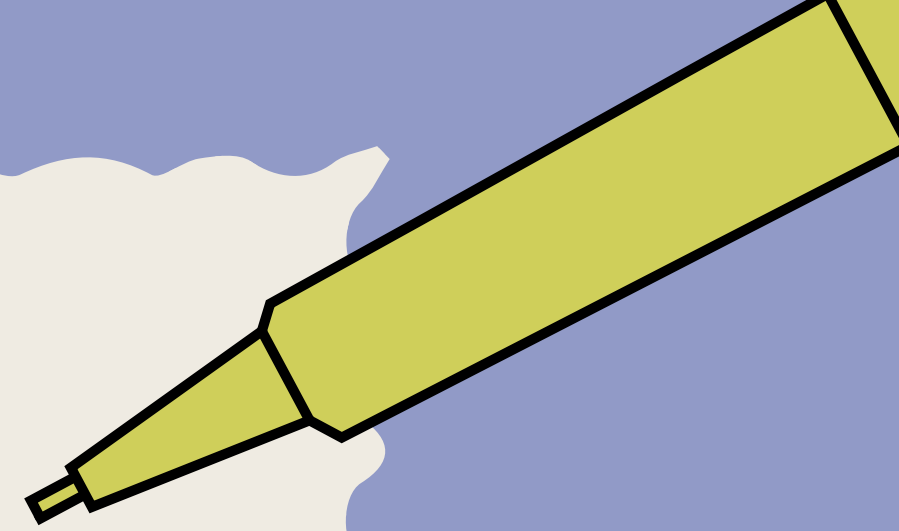
The Chicago Guide to
Copyediting Fiction
by Amy J. Schneider



Let's Get to Examples!



Dialogue Alone



“I didn’t want to do that today.”

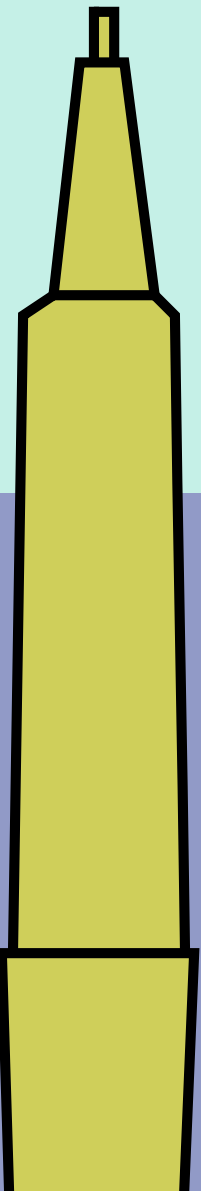
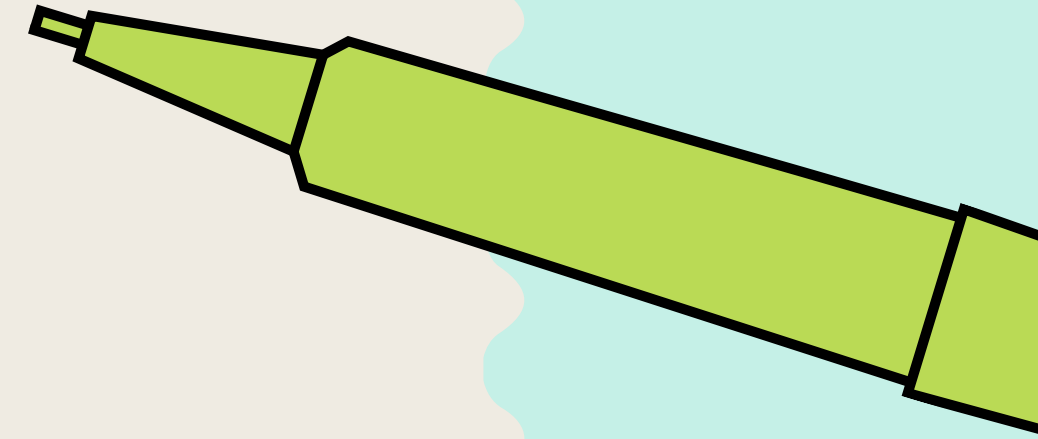
“But why did you do that?”

“Stop doing that!”

Dialogue Alone

“I didn’t want to do tha—”

“But why did you do that . . .”



Preceding Dialogue Tag



She said, "I didn't want to do that today."

She asked: "But why did you do that?"

Dialogue Tags After

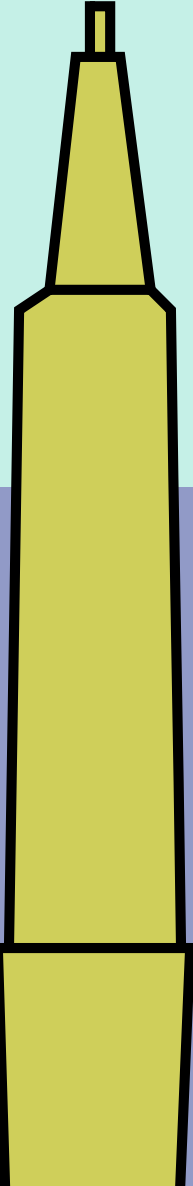


“I didn’t want to do that today,” she said.

“I didn’t want to do that today,” Lauren said.

“But why did you do that?” she asked.

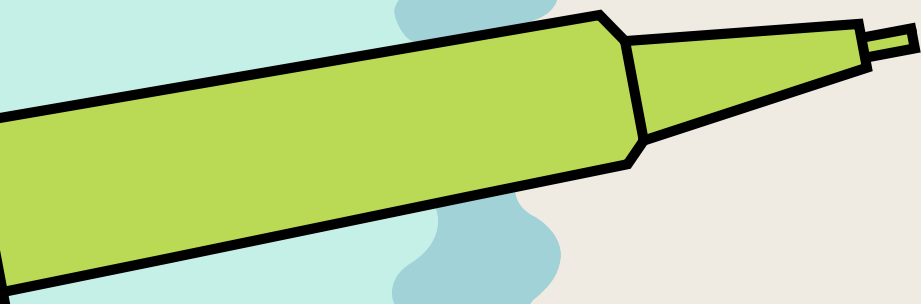
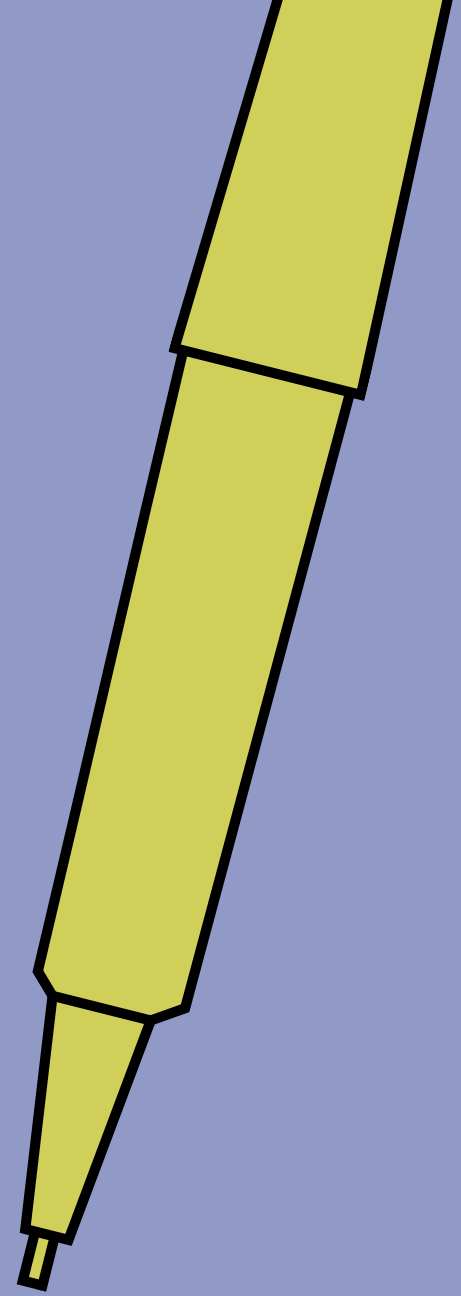
“Stop doing that!” Lauren shouted.



Dialogue Tag + Extra

“I didn’t want to do that today,” she said,
turning away from him.

“I didn’t want to do that today,” Lauren said
as she turned away.

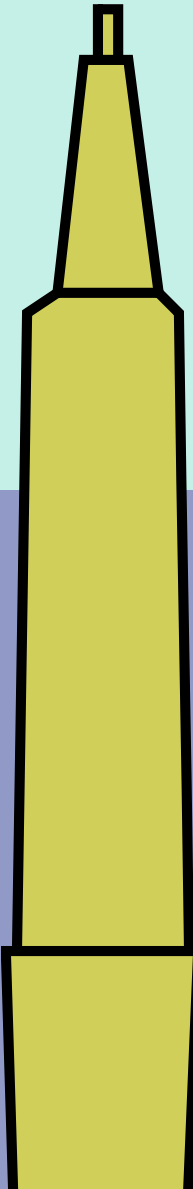


Dialogue + Tag + Dialogue



“I’m quite busy,” she said. “And I didn’t want to do that today.”

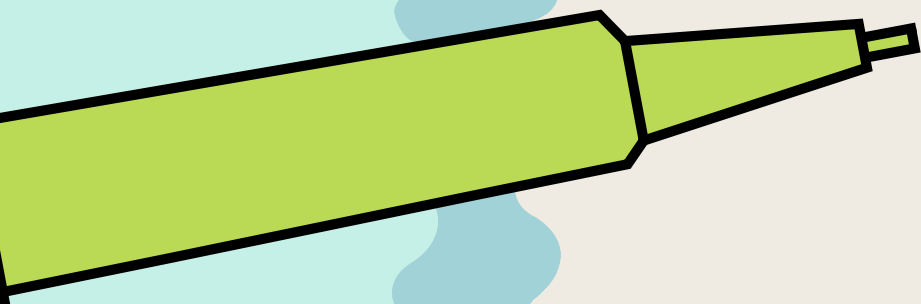
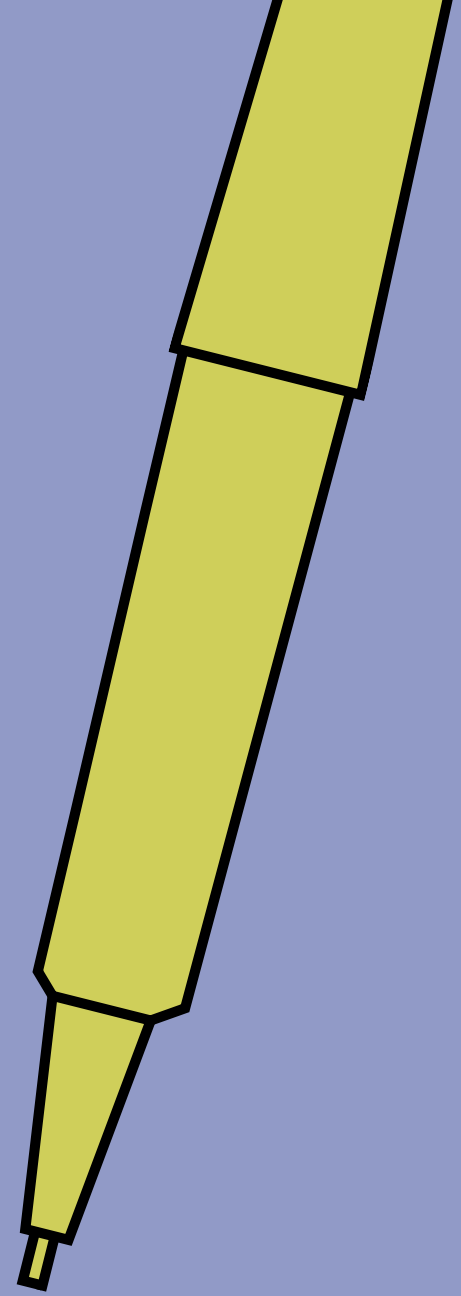
“I wonder,” she said, “if it’s possible we could not do that today?”



Dialogue + Action Beat

“I didn’t want to do that today.” She hit the table with her fist.

She started crying. “But why did you do that?”



Dialogue + Action + Dialogue

“I don’t understand.” She started crying.

“Why did you do that?”

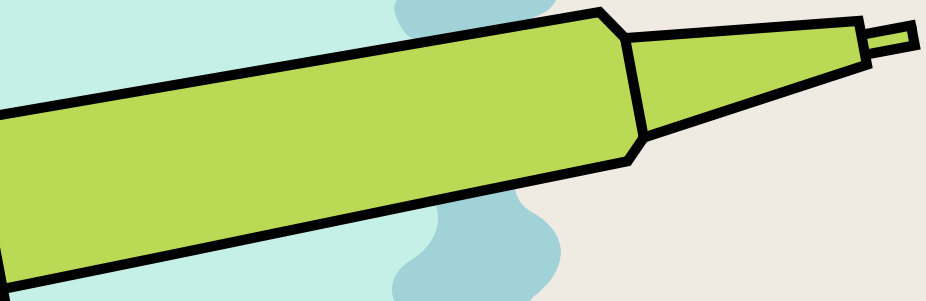
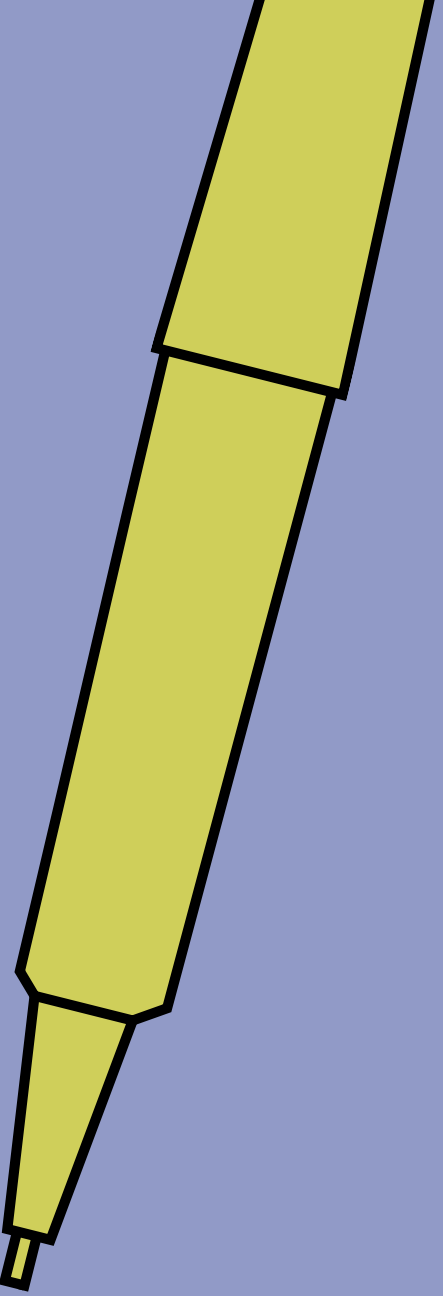
“I didn’t”—she hit the table—“want to do that today.”

“I didn’t want to—” The door slammed at that moment. “—do that.”

Quote Within A Quote

“At first, she said ‘I don’t understand’ and started crying.”

“And then she said ‘I didn’t want to do that today.’”

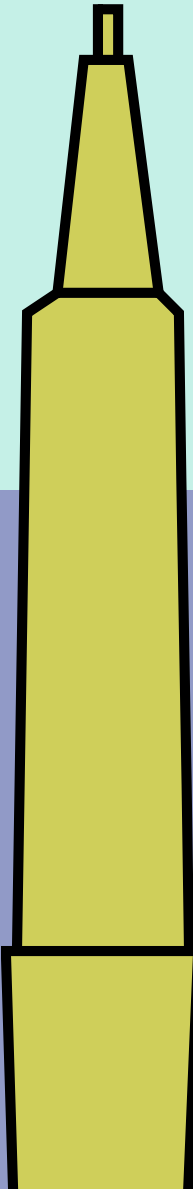


Multiple Paragraph Quotes



“... I won't say it again. We're going to do it whether you like it or not.”

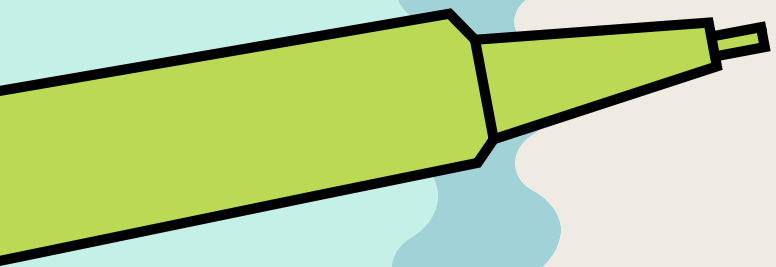
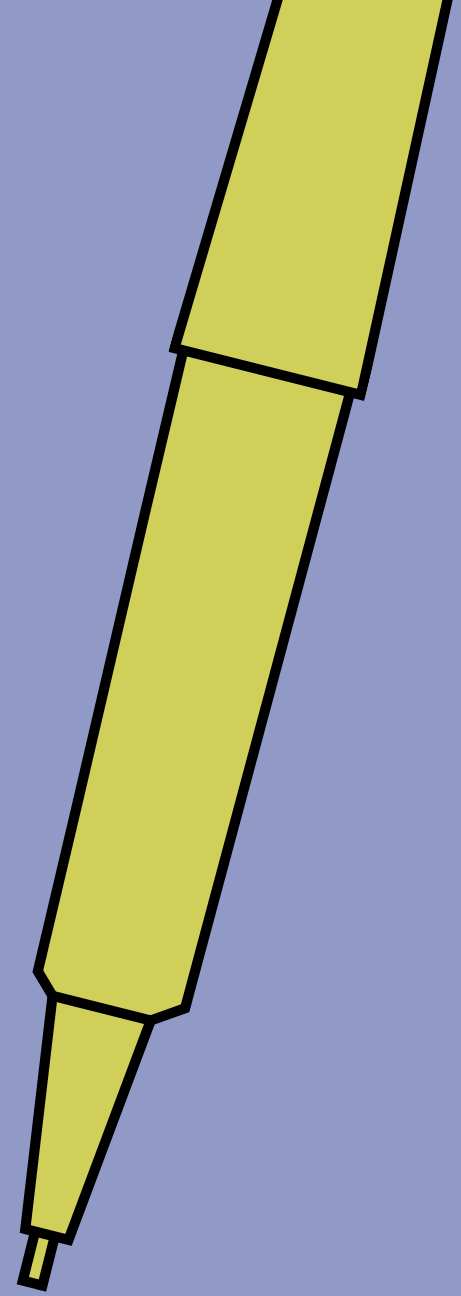
“It isn't up to you. I say what we do.”



Non Dialogue

Her body language screamed “I don’t want to do that.”

“He would tell me ‘We’re going to do that’ even when I didn’t want to,” Rob said.



Stuttering

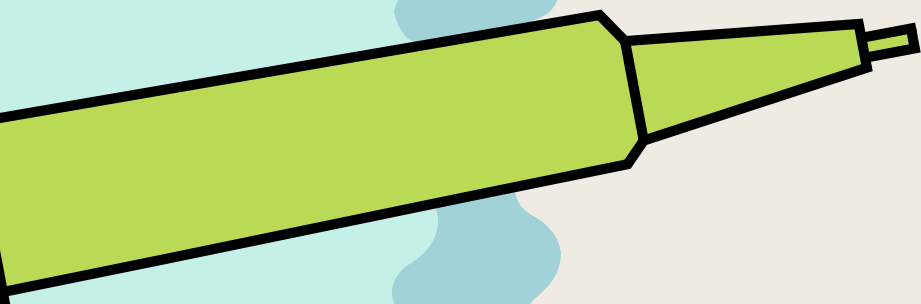
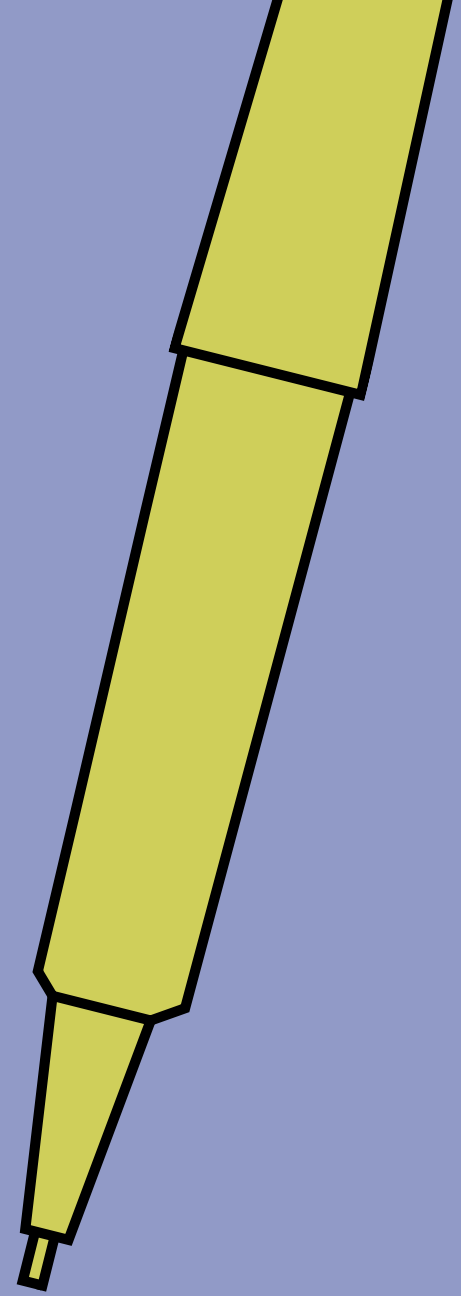
“B-b-but I didn’t wa-want to do th-that today.”

“I—I—I don’t think I can do that”

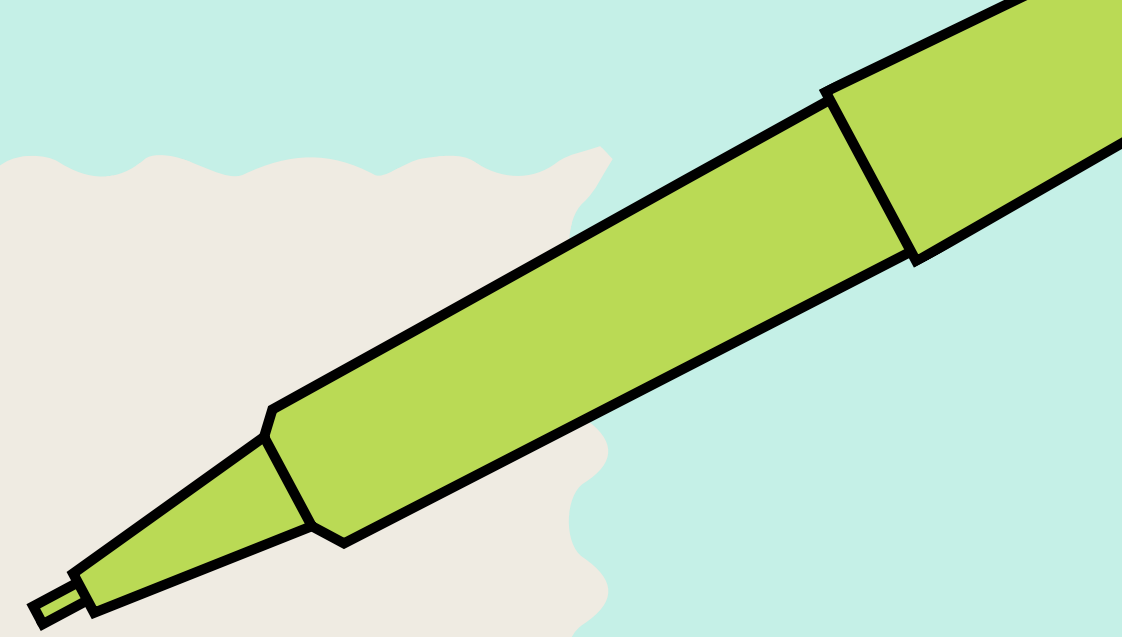
Spoken Punctuation

“I don’t care if you quote unquote don’t
want to do that.”

“This is my girlfriend-slash-person-who-
doesn’t-like-to-do-that.”



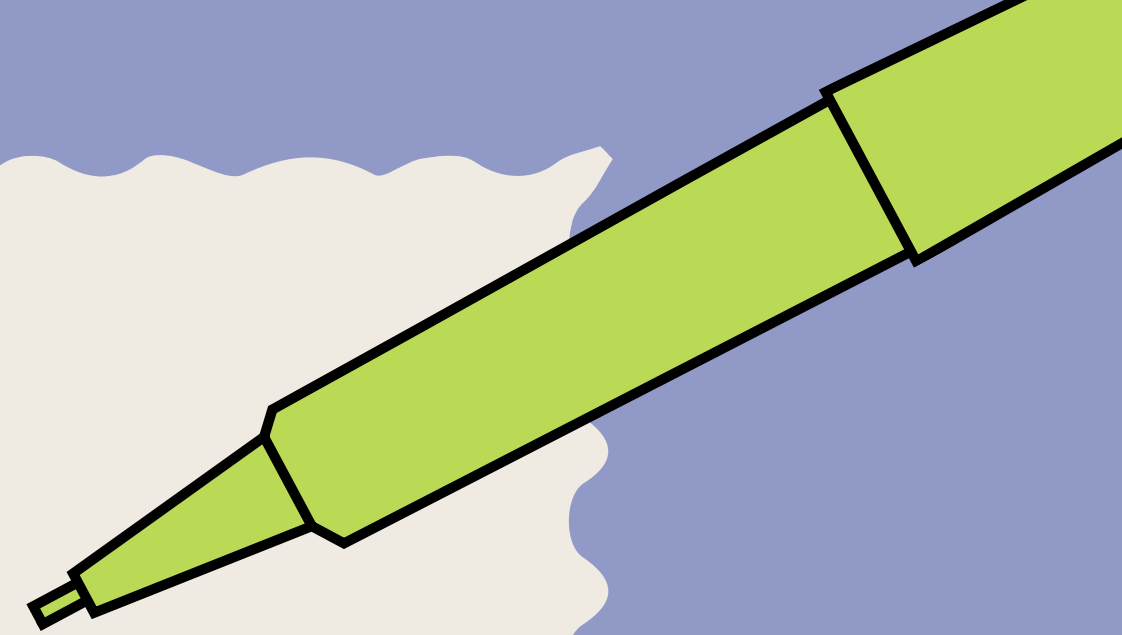
Practice Time



[www.jeanettehethe
writer.com/
dialogue-
punctuation](http://www.jeanettehethe
writer.com/
dialogue-
punctuation)



Free Cheat Sheet



Dialogue Punctuation

Standalone dialogue ends with terminal punctuation inside quotation marks:
 "I didn't want to do that today."
 "But why did you do that?"
 "Stop doing that!"

Ellipses are used for trailing off speech. An **em dash** indicates an interruption. Both go inside the quotation mark.
 "I didn't want to do tha—"
 "But why did you do that . . ."

Preceding speaker tags use either a comma or colon after the verb, followed by a quotation mark and the quote.
 She said, "I didn't want to do that today."
 She asked: "But why did you do that?"

Dialogue tags at the end use a comma where you might otherwise have placed a period and follow with a lowercase letter (not including proper nouns). **Dialogue ending in a question mark, exclamation point, ellipsis, or em dash** still uses a lowercase letter after the end quotation mark. End a simple speaker tag in a period.
 "I didn't want to do that today," she said.
 "I didn't want to do that today," Lauren said.
 "But why did you do that?" she asked.
 "Stop doing that!" Lauren shouted.

Sentences continuing after the speaker tag are punctuated according to normal grammar rules.
 "I didn't want to do that today," she said, turning away from him.
 "I didn't want to do that today," Lauren said as she turned away.

Speaker tags in the middle of dialogue are punctuated depending on if the dialogue is one sentence or two. If two, end the speaker tag in a period and start a new quote. If one, use a comma after your tag and lowercase for the following dialogue.
 "I'm quite busy," she said. "And I didn't want to do that today."
 "I wonder," she said, "is it possible we could not do that today?"

Dialogue followed by an action or description are treated as separate sentences.
 "I didn't want to do that today." She hit the table with her fist.
 She started crying. "But why did you do that?"

Actions appearing in the middle of dialogue are usually punctuated as separate sentences, kept all in the same paragraph. If the action happens concurrently with the dialogue, use em dashes outside the quotes.
 "I don't understand." She started crying. "Why did you do that?"
 "I didn't"—she hit the table—"want to do that today."

Quotes within quotes are done via single quotation marks. All single quotes should stay within the final quotation mark, but outside of any terminal punctuation.
 "At first, she said, 'I don't understand' and started crying."
 "And then she said, 'I didn't want to do that today.'"

Lay/Lie

Present Tense:

- Lay: Lay the blanket on the floor.
- Lie: Lie down.

Past Tense:

- Lay: She laid the blanket down.
- Lie: I felt sick, so I lay down.

Past Participle:

- Lay: She had laid the blanket down.
- Lie: I had lain there for some time.

Present participle:

- Lay: I was laying the blanket down.
- Lie: You've been lying down all day.

Adjective Order

Determiner
 Quantity
 Opinion
 Size
 Age
 Shape
 Color
 Origin
 Material
 Purpose

Numbers

- In nontechnical contexts, spell out whole numbers from zero through one hundred and certain round multiples.
- Always use numerals for:
 - Abbreviated units of measure
 - Before the word "percent"
 - Parts of a document
 - With symbols (\$, %, ")
 - Numbers for streets, rooms, places
 - Dates
 - Grades and levels
 - Clothing sizes
 - Category or severity (type 2 diabetes, cat 5 hurricane)
 - Scores and vote tallies
- Times of day in even, half, and quarter hours are spelled out. With o'clock, the number is always spelled out.
- Numerals are used when exact times are emphasized. Numerals are also used when "a.m." or "p.m." is specified.

Trickies

Complement = match, foil	Brake = to stop (a vehicle)
Compliment = praise	Break = to shatter or a pause
Capital = city or financial	Peak = summit
Capitol = legislative building	Peek = glance quickly
Discreet = tactful, careful	Pique = to provoke
Discrete = separate/distinct	Bare = uncovered
Council = a group	Bear = the animal or to carry
Counsel = advice or a lawyer	Farther = physical distance
Patients = people receiving care	Further = metaphorical/figurative distance
Patience = tolerance or self-control	Emigrate = to leave a country
Mettle = courage	Immigrate = to enter a country
Medal = award	Elicit = to draw out
Metal = element or alloy	Illicit = illegal
Meddle = to interfere	Desert = dry region, to abandon
Right = correct or direction	Dessert = sweet treat
Write = to compose text	Principal = school leader or main thing
Rite = ritual or ceremony	Principle = fundamental rule or belief
Writ = legal document	Stationary = not moving
Reign = rule of a monarch	Stationery = paper goods
Rein = leather strap or control	Affect (verb) = to influence
Rain = precipitation	Effect (noun) = a result
Sight = vision	
Site = location	
Cite = to reference	

Capitals vs Lowercase

- Civil, military, religious, and professional titles** are capitalized when they immediately precede a personal name. Titles are normally lowercased when following a name or used in place of a name.
- Names of **ethnic and national and other regional groups** and adjectives associated with these names are capitalized.
- Terms describing groups or individuals according to **abilities and disabilities** are usually lowercased.
- Personal, national, and geographic names**, and words derived from them, are often lowercased when used in a nonliteral sense. When in doubt, check Merriam-Webster.
- The full names of **institutions, groups, and companies** and the names of their **departments** are capitalized.
- Nouns and adjectives designating **cultural styles, movements, and schools** (artistic, architectural, musical, and so forth) and their adherents are capitalized if derived from proper nouns.
- Specific wording of common **short signs or notices** is capitalized in title case in running text.

Italics vs Quotation Marks

- Italics are the traditional choice for singling out **non-English words** and phrases that do not appear in Merriam-Webster. Extended passages or quotations that are entirely in another language are not italicized.
- A **longer notice or sign** is better treated as a quotation.
- When a word or phrase is **referred to as the word or phrase itself**, it is either italicized or enclosed in quotation marks. Italics are the more common option.
- Individual letters** and combinations of letters of the Latin alphabet are usually italicized.

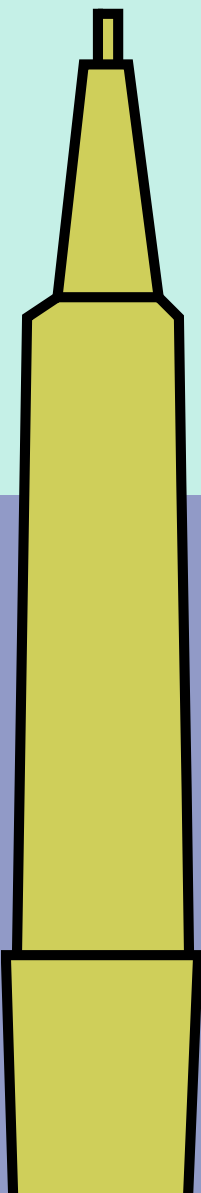
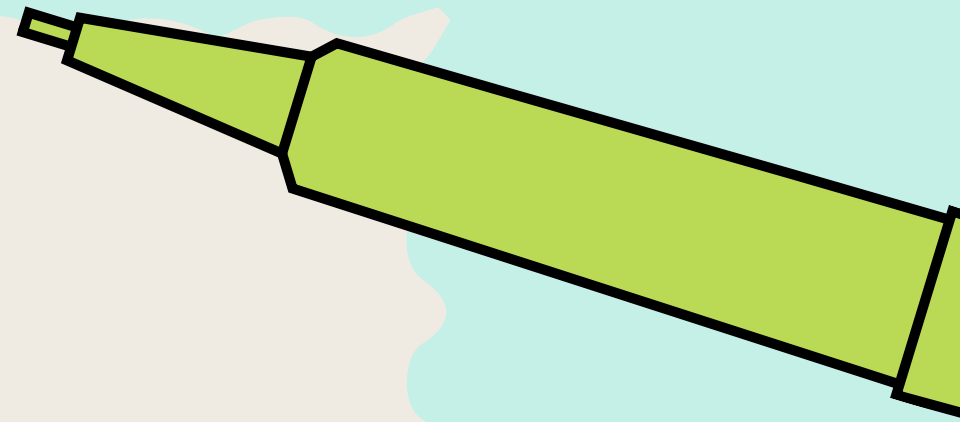
Abbreviations

- Use periods with abbreviations that end in a lowercase letter
- Use periods for initials standing for given names; do not use periods for an entire name replaced by initials
- Use no periods with abbreviations that include two or more capital letters



Self-Editing Resources

Blogs,
Newsletter,
Courses



Get In Touch



www.Jeanettethewriter.com
Jeanette@Jeanettethewriter.com
LinkedIn: Jeanette Smith

Beaconpointservices.org
KMChambers@beaconpointservices.org
LinkedIn: Katie Chambers



Thank You

Questions?

