

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: You’d better **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

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

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
Compliment = praise

Capital = city or financial
Capitol = legislative building

Discreet = tactful, careful
Discrete = separate/distinct

Council = a group
Counsel = advice or a lawyer

Patients = people receiving care
Patience = tolerance or self-control

Mettle = courage
Medal = award
Metal = element or alloy
Meddle = to interfere

Right = correct or direction
Write = to compose text
Rite = ritual or ceremony
Writ = legal document

Reign = rule of a monarch
Rein = leather strap or control
Rain = precipitation

Sight = vision
Site = location
Cite = to reference

Brake = to stop (a vehicle)
Break = to shatter or a pause

Peak = summit
Peek = glance quickly
Pique = to provoke

Bare = uncovered
Bear = the animal or to carry

Farther = physical distance
Further = metaphorical/figurative distance

Emigrate = to leave a country
Immigrate = to enter a country

Elicit = to draw out
Illicit = illegal

Desert = dry region, to abandon
Dessert = sweet treat

Principal = school leader or main thing
Principle = fundamental rule or belief

Stationary = not moving
Stationery = paper goods

Affect (verb) = to influence
Effect (noun) = a result