

Punctuation with Quoted Material

Commas and periods always go inside quotation marks; colons, semicolons, and footnote numbers always go outside quotation marks.

The following examples illustrate the proper use of punctuation with quotation marks:

The director said that "the new policy was ready for implementation," but the committee disagreed.

The director believes that "the new policy is ready for implementation"; however, she made her recommendation without studying the entire proposal.

The committee has published the results of its study in a paper entitled "Employee Morale."

1. If a question mark is part of the quotation, it goes inside the quotation marks.

As part of our study, we asked agency officials to respond to the following question: "Do you plan to retire within the next 5 years?"

2. A question mark follows the quotation marks if it applies to the entire sentence.

Are our conclusions going to be in our testimony "Aid to Central America"?

* NOTE: The rules apply to both SBE (Standard British English) and GA (General American), however there is one difference between British and American punctuation.

GA: "" for outer quotations, " for inner quotations

Example: She said, "He told me the paper was 'good enough,' but I think he was being sarcastic."

SBE: " for outer quotations, "" for inner quotations

Example: She said, 'He told me the paper was "good enough," but I think he was being sarcastic.'