

Punctuating Dialogue I

Dialogue is the exact speech used in conversation between two or more people. A **direct quotation**, the restatement of someone's exact words, begins with a capital letter and is set off with quotation marks. Commas and periods at the end of a direct quotation always go inside quotation marks.

Grandpa said, "That story by Tolstoy teaches a valuable lesson."

Question marks and exclamation points go inside quotation marks if they belong to the quotation itself.

"What a sad story!" cried José.

Nadine asked, "Do you mean that story about the grandfather and the wooden bowl?"

Question marks and exclamation points go outside quotation marks if they do not belong to the quotation.

Did Grandpa smile when you said, "I just read it"?

How sad it was to read, "The old man sighed and said nothing"!

In dialogue, a new paragraph begins each time the speaker changes.

Exercise A: Using Proper Paragraphing in Dialogue

At the end of the brief selection below, write the five words, not counting *Are*, that would begin paragraphs if the selection were written correctly.

"Are you finished?" asked José. "I will be in a minute," Nadine replied. "I can't find my glasses." "Hurry up, Nadine!" "You must really want my opinion of it to rush me like this." "You're right about that, Nadine, so I'll let you finish." "Thank you."

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

Exercise B: Capitalizing and Punctuating Dialogue

Circle the correct choice in each sentence below.

- "I hope you enjoy tonight's (reading, /reading,) said Rosa, "even if you do have a (cold. /cold".)
- Luis responded, "(She, she) must be sure it's a good story."
- Rosa asked, "Are you familiar with Tolstoy's writings(?, "?)
- Why did she add, "Some of his works can be difficult to understand(?, "?)
- Luis said, ("maybe, "Maybe) I should read it with special care."

Punctuating Dialogue II

A dialogue—a record of people’s talking—follows these rules:

- Enclose each person’s words in quotation marks.
- Capitalize the first word of a direct quotation. In a divided quotation, *do not* capitalize the second part unless it begins a new sentence.
- Use a comma to separate words such as *he said* or *she answered* from the rest of the sentence.
- Include end punctuation that belongs to the quotation—a period, question mark, or exclamation mark—inside the quotation marks.

Mai Lin asked, “**D**id you read the story?”

“**Y**es,” answered Tony, “**b**ut I don’t understand it.”

“**T**hat’s okay,” said Colleen. “**W**e’ll help you.”

Exercise: Punctuating Dialogue

Edit the dialogue below, adding capital letters and punctuation where necessary.

1. The oral tradition has not been very important in my family said Tony. Does your family tell stories?
2. It sure does Colleen exclaimed. We Irish are famous storytellers, you know.
3. Mai Lin added my family tells stories too. My grandmother used to tell me that story about Auntie Lily that’s in our textbook.
4. Did she really asked Colleen. It must be fun to compare her version with Laurence Yep’s.
5. There are a few differences said Mai Lin but the basic idea is the same.
6. Tony said you girls sure are lucky.
7. Why asked Colleen and Mai Lin together.
8. Well he answered those stories make you part of a culture.
9. Everybody’s part of a culture laughed Mai Lin. I bet your family at least tells family stories.
10. Tony grinned as he exclaimed hey, you’re right! Those would count, wouldn’t they?

Punctuating Dialogue III

When you quote material, you must quote it exactly. If you omit words from a quotation, indicate the omission with an **ellipsis**, a series of three spaced dots. If *the ellipsis appears at the end of a sentence, the three dots are preceded by a period.*

Original Most of the Greek myths, like myths of many cultures, have been told and retold in many different versions.

Quoted According to one writer, "Most of the Greek myths . . . have been told and retold in many different versions."

Exercise: Using Ellipses in Quoted Text

Read the following student version of how humans acquired fire.

Prometheus had been charged by the gods with the creation of human beings. He took up earth, mixed it with water, and formed a man (women did not appear until later) in the image of the gods. He made the man upright, unlike the animals, so the new creature could look to the heavens and the stars. His brother Epimetheus, meanwhile, took on the animals, endowing this one with courage, that one with strength, this one with wisdom, that one with speed. But Epimetheus was so generous with his gifts to the birds, fish, and four-footed creatures that there was nothing left for the man. When he turned to his brother Prometheus for help, Prometheus rode to heaven and lit his torch at the sun. He gave the torch to the man so that this unfurred, unclawed—in other words, helpless—creature could survive.

The sentences below are from a student paper comparing two versions of this story. Rewrite each sentence on the line, inserting ellipses where necessary.

1. The student's version of the myth explains that Prometheus "formed a man in the image of the gods."

2. According to this writer, "He made the man upright so the new creature could look to the heavens and the stars."

3. This version also introduces Epimetheus, who gave gifts to the animals, "endowing this one with courage, that one with strength."

4. Unfortunately, "Epimetheus was so generous that there was nothing left for the man."

5. Prometheus helped his brother, however, and gave the man a torch lit by the sun "so that this unfurred, unclawed creature could survive."
