Dialogue

Quotation marks are used in fiction writing to show that words or phrases are coming from a certain speaker; this is often referred to as dialogue. In general, the speaker’s words are enclosed in quotation marks, and the first letter of the statement is capitalized:

Captain Beefheart said, “Somebody’s had too much to think.”

- Note the comma after said. When verbs like said, replied, whispered, asked, or admitted are used in this way, they are called dialogue tags. A comma comes after the dialogue tag and before the quotation marks.

However, not every phrase that introduces a quotation requires that comma. Sometimes a clause indicates a speaker without using a word like said to introduce the characters’ words. Commonly, these include characters’ actions, and a period separates them from the dialogue:

Captain Beefheart shrugged and shook his head. “Somebody’s had too much to think.”

When a dialogue tag comes after the dialogue, the phrase including the dialogue tag is not capitalized (unless the following word requires capitalization regardless, such as a person’s name). If the speaker’s statement would ordinarily end in a period, the period is replaced with a comma, which is placed inside the quotation marks:

“In this room, the heat pipes just cough,” said Bob Dylan.

Sometimes a dialogue tag can be inserted within a character’s quoted statement, resulting in a divided quotation. This often signals a pause, tells what the character is doing while speaking, or identifies the speaker before the reader reaches the end of the statement:

“I don’t usually enjoy concerts,” said Roger, “but that performance was very entertaining.”

“I wonder,” he said, rubbing his chin, “what’s so secret about their secret meeting?”

- Notice that after the interrupting dialogue tag, a comma precedes the continuation. The continuation of the statement does not require capitalization.

If the dialogue requires a different kind of end punctuation (exclamation mark or question mark), then that punctuation mark is used in place of the comma:

“Do you want to buy a special sandwich?” the little girl asked.

- No matter which punctuation mark is used to end the quote (except a period), it is placed inside the quotation marks.
When more than one character is speaking, a new paragraph begins every time the speaker changes. Since the paragraph breaks indicate the change of speakers, you do not need to keep including dialogue tags and naming speakers who have already been introduced (unless the speaker is unclear in spite of this):

“How have you been?” asked Tom.
“Not so good,” replied Steve, “I just ate the most terrifying sandwich in the world.”
“A terrifying sandwich? What was wrong with it?”
“It was just full of hatred. I’ve never felt anything that compares to the bad vibes I got from that sandwich.”

When a character quotes another character in his/her dialogue, the quote-within-a-quote is marked by single quotation marks:

“But the soldier said ‘Sir, there’s a crack in the world,’” remarked David Bowie.

When a character’s speech begins in one paragraph and then continues into following paragraphs, quotation marks (“”) are placed at the beginning of each paragraph that continues the spoken words, but closing quotation marks (“”) are not included until the speech ends or is broken up by a dialogue tag or an interruption of action or description.

“What bothers me about saying that you could care less,” she began, “is that it means the opposite of what it’s intended to mean. The words imply that it’s possible for you to care even less.
“And it’s always an exaggeration to say something is all over something else. If there was truly milk all over the floor, the floor would be entirely covered. You wouldn’t even see it anymore.”

An indirect quotation tells what a character said, but not through that character’s dialogue. You can think of it as the character’s statement given through someone else’s voice (another character, the narrator, the author, etc.). These are often indicated through words like that or if, as in the following examples:

Mark said that the buses don’t run on Sundays.
Diane asked if we enjoyed the party.

- Indirect quotations usually have a word like said, which is often a dialogue tag, but the context of the sentence indicates that the words are not coming directly from the speaker.
- Personal pronouns (he, she) may also signal indirect quotations. They indicate the speaker in places where a direct quotation would use the word I (to indicate that the speaker is talking about him or herself):

Josie said that she does not like white shoes or the people who wear them.