



Allegory Editing

[info@allegoryediting.com](mailto:info@allegoryediting.com)

206-569-8544

---

## Dialogue Formatting Guide

---

### Put punctuation inside quotation marks.

“Maria and Sam are coming to the party.”

**Except: Ending punctuation goes outside the quotation marks when it is not part of the quotation.**

Did I hear her say, “Yes”?

### Capitalize the first word of dialogue.

Paul said, “**W**e will come on the train.”

### Do not capitalize the dialogue tag when it comes after the dialogue.

“Yes, I have our tickets,” **s**aid Mother.

### Use a comma to set off the dialogue tag.

Dylan said, “Come skiing with us. It’ll be fun.”

### Place the comma inside closing quotation marks when speaker's tag follows the quotation.

“Let’s do it,” Zoe said.

### Place question marks and exclamation points inside closing quotation marks when the speaker's tag follows the quotation.

“Are we doing this?” Zoe asked.

“Let’s do it!” Zoe said.

### When a full sentence of dialogue is divided by a speaker’s dialogue tag, place a comma after the tag, and after any words that come between the tag and the continuation of the sentence. Begin the second half of the sentence with a lowercase letter.

“You didn’t tell him,” **s**he said, her voice on the edge of **breaking**, “**t**hat you were his father?”

### When the dialogue tag separates two distinct sentences, use a period after the tag and capitalize the second sentence.

“Watch out!” Sarah said. “**T**he ground is slippery there.”

### When using an action tag instead of a dialogue tag, do not use a comma.

“Should we get started?” Shawn plopped an overstuffed folder on the table.

“That about wraps it up.” Shawn restacked the papers and slid them into his briefcase.

Shawn plopped an overstuffed folder on the table. “Should we get started?”

**When an action tag separates full sentences of dialogue, do not use commas.**

“That about wraps it up!” Shawn restacked the papers. “There’s nothing else to say, is there?”

**When a full sentence of dialogue is divided by an action, set off the action with commas and do not capitalize the beginning of the action. Begin the second half of the sentence with a lowercase letter.**

“You didn’t tell him,” **she threw the letter on the floor, “that** you were his father?”

**Use em-dashes where a sentence breaks off, such as when one character interrupts another.**

“First, we break into the bank, then—”

**Use . . . when dialogue trails off, such as when one character is unsure, or does not want to finish the sentence.**

“Shush,” he said. “I thought I heard something . . .”

**Use an ellipsis (without spaces) ... when words are missing, such as when the point of view character doesn’t hear everything that is said.**

“First, we break into ... then ... take over ... get into ... don’t bother to...”

**If indentations are used in the text, indent the first line of dialogue. When one character stops speaking and the focus moves to another character’s speech or actions, begin a new paragraph.**

“Stop it!” she said. “Are you trying to break it?”

**Dan** dropped the watch into the mud.

**Keep each character’s response and descriptive material with his or her dialogue.**

**Jamie** slid into the booth next to the door. “Some coffee, Rae.”

**Anne** looked up from stirring her tea. It was now or never. “Hey, Jamie,” she said.

**Use double quotation marks for regular dialogue and single quotation marks for anything quoted by a character:**

“Mom said to Dad, ‘I found this in his room,’ but that was a lie.”

**A character’s interior thoughts can be in italics.**

Anne stirred sugar into her tea, keeping her head down. *He hadn’t seen her yet, but she was certain that he would. What would she say to him when he came over?*

**OR a character’s internal thoughts can be in standard text.**

Anne stirred sugar into her tea, keeping her head down. He hadn’t seen her yet, but she was certain that he would. What would she say to him when he came over?

**The important thing for internal thoughts, whether italicized or standard text, is consistency. Choose one format for internal thoughts and use it throughout the manuscript.**