# Integrating Quotations into Sentences

You should never have a quotation standing alone as a complete sentence, or, worse, as an incomplete sentence, in your writing. The quotation will seem disconnected from your own thoughts and from the flow of your sentences. Ways to integrate quotations properly into your own sentences, with correct use of punctuation, are explained below.

**Three ways to integrate quotations.**

**1. Sentence lead-in: Introduce the quotation with a complete sentence and a colon.**

**Example:** In "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," Thoreau states directly his purpose for going into the woods: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

**Example:** Thoreau ends his essay with a metaphor: "Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in."

This is an easy rule to remember: if you use a complete sentence to introduce a quotation, you need a colon after the sentence. Be careful not to confuse a colon **(:)** with a semicolon **(;)**. Using a comma in this situation will most likely create a comma splice, one of the serious sentence-boundary errors.

**2. Somebody said lead-in: Use the author’s last name in an introductory or explanatory phrase, but not a complete sentence, separated from the quotation with a comma.**

**Example:** Thoreau suggests the consequences of making ourselves slaves to progress when he says, "We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us."

**Example:** Thoreau asks, "Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life?"

**Example:** According to Thoreau, "We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us."

You should use a comma to separate your own words from the quotation when your introductory or explanatory phrase ends with a verb such as "says," "said," "thinks," "believes," "pondered," "recalls," "questions," and "asks" (and many more). You should also use a comma when you introduce a quotation with a phrase such as "According to Thoreau."

**3. Blended lead-in: Make the quotation a part of your own sentence without any punctuation between your own words and the words you are quoting.**

**Example:** Thoreau suggests the consequences of making ourselves slaves to progress when he says that "We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us."

**Example:** Thoreau argues that "shams and delusions are esteemed for soundest truths, while reality is fabulous."

**Example:** According to Thoreau, people are too often "thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails."

Notice that the word "that" is used in three of the examples above, and when it is used as it is in the examples, "that" replaces the comma which would be necessary without "that" in the sentence. You usually have a choice, then, when you begin a sentence with a phrase such as "Thoreau says." You either can add a comma after "says" (Thoreau says, "quotation") or you can add the word "that" with no comma (Thoreau says that "quotation.")

**Notice the Punctuation!**

Notice that there are only two punctuation marks that are used to introduce quotations: the comma and the colon **(:)**. Note that a semicolon **(;)** is not used to introduce quotations.

Notice as well the punctuation of the sentences above in relation to the quotations. If there are no parenthetical citations in the sentences (no author's name and page number in parentheses), the commas and periods go inside the final quotation mark ("like this."). For whatever reason, this is the way we do it in America. In England, though, the commas and periods go outside of the final punctuation mark.

Semicolons and colons go outside of the final quotation mark ("like this";).

Question marks and exclamation points go outside of the final quotation mark if the punctuation mark is part of your sentence--your question or your exclamation ("like this"?). Those marks go inside of the final quotation mark if they are a part of the original--the writer's question or exclamation ("like this!").

**The Proper Punctuation: Keeping it Simple**

Remembering just a few simple rules can help you use the correct punctuation as you introduce quotations. There are some exceptions to the rules below, but they should help you use the correct punctuation with quotations most of the time.

* **Rule 1:** Complete sentence**:** "quotation." (If you use a complete sentence to introduce a quotation, use a colon (**:**) just before the quotation.)
* **Rule 2:** Someone says**,** "quotation." (If the word just before the quotation is a verb indicating someone uttering the quoted words, use a comma. Examples include the words "says," "said," "states," "asks," and "yells." But remember that there is no punctuation if the word "that" comes just before the quotation, as in "the narrator says that.")
* **Rule 3:** If Rules 1 and 2 do not apply, do not use any punctuation between your words and the quoted words.

And remember that a semicolon (**;**) never is used to introduce quotations.

These rules oversimplify the use of punctuation with quotations, but applying just these few rules should help you use the correct punctuation about 90 percent of time.