Quotation Marks

Problem: Quotation marks have two forms, single (‘’) and double (“”), that are easy to confuse. However, each mark has its own specific purpose. Misusing quotation marks can prevent readers from understanding which material you are citing, and where it comes from.

Solution: Analyze exactly what it is that you want to set off in quotation marks, and then apply the following rules.

Place double quotation marks around:

1) The beginning and ending of an exact quotation that you are drawing from a cited source.

- Example: Dwight Atkinson disagrees with a definition of culture as “a diversity of separate societies, each with its own culture” (2004).
- Example: According Karl Marx, ideology is “a system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind” (Althusser 113).

2) The title of a short text (e.g. article, short story, or poem).

- Example: “The Man Made of Words,” by N. Scott Momaday
- Example: “The Raven,” by Edgar Allen Poe

3) Character dialogue (in stories and other narrative writing).

- Example: “Excuse me,” he said. “I’m looking for the Music building.” He motioned toward the west. “Is it there?” Katherine looked at him more closely. He was handsome. “Yes,” she said. “It’s over there. The building with the red brick front. Do you see it?”

4) Words that you want to emphasize as words.

- Example: When you are using a conjunction like “however,” it is important to use the proper punctuation.
- Example: The word “race” can elicit strong emotional responses from people.

Use Single Quotation Marks inside of double quotation marks when:

1) The material that you are quoting includes a quotation of its own.

- Example: “What do you mean ‘It’s not a problem’?” he yelled back at me.

2) A title that falls inside of another title:

General Reminders about Quotation Marks

1) Always use them in pairs: “ ” or ‘ ’

Incorrect: John said, I really wish she would come to the party.”
Correct: John said, “I really wish she would come to the party.”

2) Do not put spaces between the quotation mark and its related material:

Incorrect: The word “race” can elicit strong emotional reactions from people.
Correct: The word “race” can elicit strong emotional reactions from people.

3) Include ending punctuation inside the quotation marks, unless you are asking a question about the quotation itself.

Incorrect: When using conjunctions like “however”, be sure to use the correct punctuation.
Correct: When using conjunctions like “however,” be sure to use the correct punctuation.

Incorrect: “No”, sighed Mary. “I really don’t want to go to the party tonight”.
Correct: “No,” sighed Mary. “I really don’t want to go to the party tonight.”

Incorrect: Did Mary just say, “I really don’t want to go to the party tonight?”
Correct: Did Mary just say, “I really don’t want to go to the party tonight”?

Note: Citation styles (e.g. MLA, APA, Chicago) each have their own rules about using other punctuation in conjunction with quotation marks. Check the style guide in your discipline to determine the correct use of items like colons, semicolons, exclamation marks, etc.