SECTION 3: PUNCTUATION AND QUOTATION MARKS

Quotations can be presented in three ways.

Paraphrase or indirect quote: Jackson said he would use all his wealth to defeat the measure.
Partial quote: Jackson said he would use “every last penny I’ve got” to defeat the measure.
Direct quote: Jackson said, “I’ll use every last penny I’ve got to keep this thing from ever becoming law.”

If the quote is wordy or lame, copy editors may find it necessary to turn direct quotes into paraphrases.

Lame: Jackson said, “I suspect, well, I guess that the SEC will take or listen to, anyway, the advice of the IRS on this one.”
Paraphrase: Jackson said he guessed the SEC would listen to the IRS’s recommendations.

However, copy editors cannot create quotes, and they surely can’t “improve” quotes by making them more sensational. They were not there and they don’t know what was said.

Original: Jackson said the United States should give help to people in the plague area.
Bad editing: Jackson said, “The United States should give help to people in the plague area.”
Worse editing: Jackson said, “We should take our blinders off and go help those people suffering from the plague.”

The only time copy editors can add quotation marks is when the reporter clearly forgot one. In the following quotation, it is clear the second sentence is also a direct quote.

Original: “I know we can do well,” the coach said. We have the best players and the best fans.”
Edited: “I know we can do well,” the coach said. “We have the best players and the best fans.”

Commas and periods always go inside quotation marks. The rule applies with full quotes, partial quotes, titles, and so on.

Not: He called the verdict “pure, unadulterated hogwash”.
But: He called the verdict “pure, unadulterated hogwash.”

Not: Shirley Jackson wrote the short story “The Lottery”.
But: Shirley Jackson wrote the short story “The Lottery.”

Use commas with attribution when you have direct quotations:

O’Hara told his fans, “I like being here.”
“I like being here,” O’Hara told his fans.

But don’t get carried away and use quotation marks and punctuation with indirect quotations (also called paraphrases). Indirect quotations look like this:

O’Hara told his fans he liked being here.
He liked being here, O’Hara told his fans.

Correcting grammar in quotes is controversial. Some journalists believe that quotes should never be modified. Others believe that it is common courtesy to recognize that spoken English is rarely as exact as written
language. A compromise at many papers is this: If the grammar error is appropriate or sounds more like normal conversation, it is not corrected. If the grammar error is not typical of the speaker, it is corrected:

*Unlikely to be corrected:* When asked who was hiding in the truck, the witness said, "It was me." (Not the grammatically correct: "It was I.")
*Probably not corrected:* They told me to lay down and close my eyes," the clerk said. "There’s three guys with guns, so that’s what I did."
*More likely to be corrected:* The dean of the law school said, "Local customs in India and, as it has been explained to me, Indian law is clear about this."

**Use commas with attributions such as "according to."** The following sentences are correct:

Four passengers on the bus were injured, according to police.
According to school officials, the teacher will be fired.

Commas aren’t used with "according to" on those rare occasions when the phrase is essential to understanding the meaning of the sentence.

The coach said the game was not played according to the rules.

**Use commas when attributions** come after, but not before, a paraphrase:

Jackson said the Badgers look strong.
The Badgers look strong, Jackson said.

**With multiple-sentence quotations,** usually the attribution is part of the first sentence.

*Not:* "I like our chances. I think our line is as strong as theirs. I know our running backs are better," Jones said.
*But:* "I like our chances," Jones said. "I think our line is as strong as theirs. I know our running backs are better."
*Or:* Jones said: "I like our chances. I think our line is as strong as theirs. I know our running backs are better."

**Use single quotation marks inside** double quotation mark.

A witness said, "The teller ran out of the bank and yelled, ‘We’ve been robbed. God help us, we’ve been robbed.’"
"When I pulled open the car door," the fireman said, "I heard a faint voice crying, ‘Mommy.’"
"No eighth-grader should be required to read Shirley Jackson’s short story ‘The Lottery,’" the principal said.

**Don’t use single quotation marks** for emphasis or to show ironic meanings.

*Not:* Lincoln dedicated his life to ‘truth and justice for all.‘
*But:* Lincoln dedicated his life to truth and justice for all.
*Or, if it’s a partial quote:* Lincoln dedicated his life to "truth and justice for all."

*Not:* The Central High Bearcats ‘clawed’ their way into the finals.
But: The Central High Bearcats clawed their way into the finals.

**Question marks** go inside quotation marks when you are quoting the entire question.

"Can we apply for a loan?" the mayor asked.  
The student asked, "Did I really flunk the final?"

However, question marks go after the quotation marks when only the final words of a sentence are being quoted:

Have you read "The Lottery"?

Fortunately, you won’t see this one very often:

The professor asked, "Have you finished reading 'The Lottery'?"