

Punctuating Quotations

1. In American usage, periods and commas must go inside quotation marks even if what you're quoting isn't a complete sentence.

No: The client asked if she could see "the smoking gun".
Yes: The client asked if she could see "the smoking gun."

2. Semicolons and colons go outside quotation marks.
3. Question marks and exclamation points go inside only if they were part of the original quotation.

Yes: Did he really say, "One more objection and I'll hold you in contempt"?
Yes: He asked, "Do you have any more questions?"

4. If the words you are quoting could stand alone as a complete sentence, either punctuate the lead-in with a comma or introduce the quotation with *that*.

No: The judge ended by saying "Plaintiffs have not established a prima facie case."
Yes: The judge ended by saying, "Plaintiffs have not established a prima facie case."
Yes: The judge ended by saying that "[p]laintiffs have not established a prima facie case."

5. When quoting a phrase, drop the comma.

Yes: The judge ended by saying that they "have not established a prima facie case."

6. Use a colon when the lead-in is a complete sentence.

Yes: The judge ended his speech: "Plaintiffs have not established a prima facie case."