

Punctuating direct speech

Direct speech means the bits of a sentence that are actually being spoken; like the words you would find in a speech bubble. Punctuating direct speech can seem complicated. Here is a step-by-step guide to getting it right.

Speech marks always need to go at the start and end of what is being said: "Are you coming to the pictures?" asked John.

There should always be punctuation before the final set of speech marks; this could be a comma, an exclamation mark or a question mark:

"Do you like watching films?" asked John.

"I love movies!" said John.

"I like watching films," said John.



There should also be a comma after the part of the sentence that tells you who is speaking:

John said, "I love movies!"

"I'm glad you like watching films," said John, "we can watch them together now."

Unless this part of the sentence comes at the end, in which case it is followed by a full stop:

"Do you like watching films?" asked John.

The final thing to remember is that you must always start a new paragraph every time the speaker changes:

"I'm glad you like watching films," said John, "we can watch them together now."

"Brilliant!" Julie replied, "I'll see you on Saturday; I'll get the snacks and you bring a film."

Punctuating direct speech

Direct speech means to use talking in stories and reports. The punctuation can be very complicated. This is a step-by-step guide to getting it right. "Speech marks" always need to go at the start and end of what is being said (including punctuation).

Activity A: Copy out these sentences, putting speech marks in the correct places.

Example: Are you coming to the pictures? asked John.

"Are you coming to the pictures?" asked John.

1. Johnny Depp is gorgeous, said Wendy.
2. No he isn't, argued Jane.
3. Wendy replied, well, many people agree with me
4. Well, he's not as good looking as Brad Pitt, said Jane
5. You're talking rubbish! Wendy shouted back.

Punctuating direct speech

Sometimes, what one person says in one go is broken up by narrative (story).

Activity B: Now add speech marks to these sentences. Be careful!

Example: Well, said Clare, I had no idea you felt like that!

"Well," said Clare, "I had no idea you felt like that!"

1. Hello, said Andy, I haven't seen you about in ages.
2. No, replied Nicki, I've just got back from holiday.
3. Where did you go? Andy asked. Was it sunny?
4. I went skiing with Kevin, Nicki grinned. It was fantastic but really cold.
5. I've always wanted to go. Was it difficult staying on the skis?

You must ALWAYS start a new paragraph each time the speaker changes.

Activity C: Here is a conversation between two people, Sue and Chris, but it's all one block even though the speech marks have been put in for you. Re-write it putting it in new paragraphs (get the speech marks right too!).

"Have you been to see Pirates of the Caribbean 2?" asked Sue. "No," said Chris, "I want to go tomorrow. Is it any good?" "It's OK, if you like that sort of thing. I preferred Ocean's 12." "Isn't it a bit like Ocean's 11?" "Not really," answered Sue. Chris said, "I really want to get Scary Movie 3 out on video again." "That was rubbish!" "It was good! I laughed a lot." "It's boring, said Sue, "I fell asleep."