Punctuating Speech



Reported Speech vs. Direct Speech

Reported speech summarises or paraphrases what has been said. It does not usually directly quote the words spoken, so does not need any special punctuation.

For example:

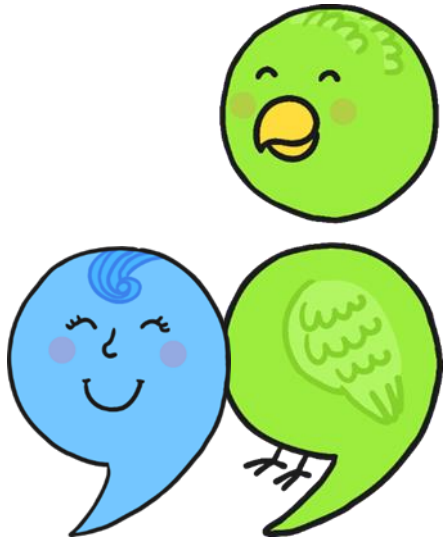
The goats said that they wanted to eat the green grass on the other side of the bridge.

The troll shouted to the goats to stay on their own side of the stream.

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Reported Speech vs. Direct Speech

When a text uses **direct speech**, some specific punctuation conventions are required to separate what is said from the rest of the text; this enables the reader to follow what is going on.



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Inverted Commas

The most important rule in punctuating direct speech is that all words spoken must be enclosed by inverted commas.

In British English, a single inverted comma can be used.
E.g. ‘Get off my bridge.’

You can also use a double inverted comma.
E.g. “Get off my bridge.”

Whichever style you choose, use it consistently across a text.



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Punctuation Inside Inverted Commas

All commas, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks must be enclosed by inverted commas.

For example:

“That grass looks delicious,” said the smallest Billy Goat Gruff.

“Hey, goat!” shouted the troll. “You are not allowed to cross my bridge!”

“How can we get to the other side?” asked the Biggest Goat Gruff.

NOT: “Get off my bridge” ! shouted the troll.



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Commas

Commas are another important tool to help the reader separate direct speech from the rest of the text.

Where direct speech **precedes** a **verb**, and does not end in a question mark or exclamation mark, **a comma must be used.**

For example:

"We need to get to the other side," **moaned** the goats.

"Those goats are always disturbing my sleep," **muttered** the troll.

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Commas

Where the direct speech before a verb ends in a question mark or exclamation mark however, this punctuation **replaces** the comma.

For example:

"Who goes there ?" shouted the troll.

NOT:

"Who goes there ?," shouted the troll.



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Commas

Where the direct speech **follows** a **verb**, a comma must be used after the verb to indicate that direct speech is about to begin.

Note: in this context, the direct speech must always begin with a capital letter.

For example:

The smallest Billy Goat Gruff **said**, "I'll go first"

The Troll **shouted**, "Who goes there?"

The biggest Billy Goat Gruff **shouted**, "Oh no you won't"



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Punctuation Inside Inverted Commas

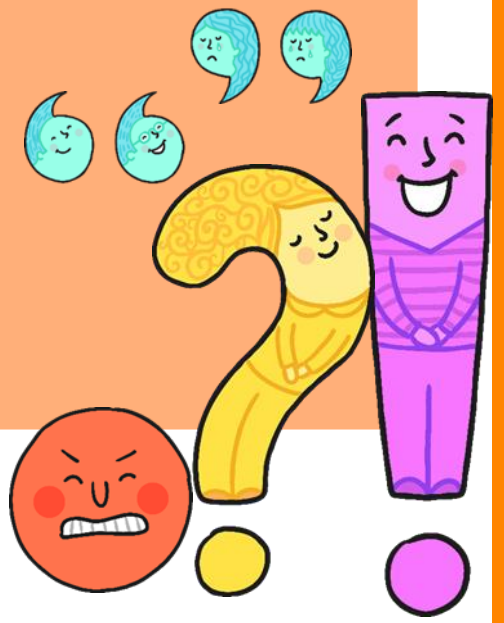
In addition, where the direct speech follows the verb, a full stop, exclamation mark or question mark **must** be used inside the inverted commas to signal the end of the speech.

For example:

The smallest Billy Goat Gruff **said**, "I'll go first."

The Troll **shouted**, "Who goes there?"

The biggest goat **shouted**, "Oh no you won't!"



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Punctuating 'Split' Direct Speech

If the direct speech is **one** sentence broken up by information about who is speaking, you need a **comma** (or a question mark or exclamation mark) to end the first piece of speech and **another comma before the concluding part of the sentence** (before the inverted comma or commas).

For example:

'I'm light and quiet," said the smallest Billy Goat Gruff, "so I'll go first."

In this context, use a **lower case letter** to start the second part of the direct speech.

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Punctuating 'Split' Direct Speech

If the direct speech is two discreet sentences separated by information about who is speaking, you need a **comma** (or a question mark or exclamation mark) to end the first piece of speech and **full stop after the information about the speaker**. The second sentence then begins with a capital letter.

For example:

"You're right," agreed the Biggest Billy Goat Gruff. "We can't let the Troll beat us."



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New Speaker, New Line

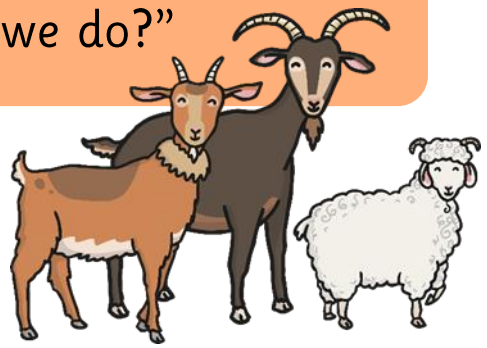
If the direct speech in a text involves more than one speaker, a new line must be used for each new speaker. This helps the reader to follow what is being said.

For example:

"We can't let him win! He's just a grumpy troll!" exclaimed the smallest Billy Goat Gruff.

"You're right," agreed the biggest Billy Goat Gruff.

The medium-sized Billy Goat Gruff said, "So what shall we do?"



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Reporting Clauses

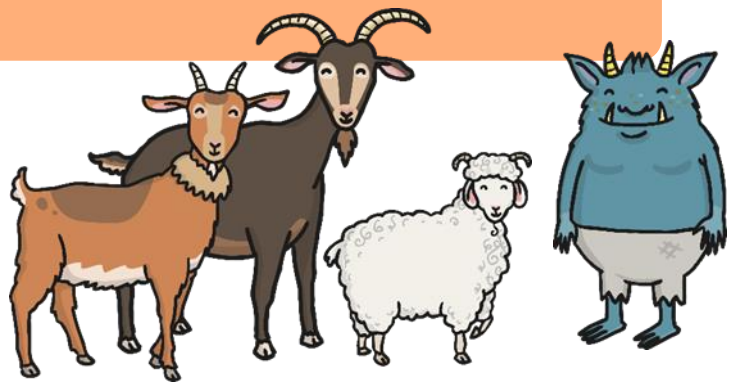
Reporting clauses tell us who is speaking, or who said what. Reporting clauses can be found in both reported speech and direct speech.

For example:

The troll said the goats should get off his bridge. **Reported speech**

“Who goes there?” shouted the Troll. **Direct speech**

“That grass looks so green and delicious,” bleated the Smallest Billy Goat Gruff. **Direct speech**



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Summary

Context	Punctuation
All reported speech	No extra punctuation.
All direct speech	Must be enclosed in inverted commas.
Direct speech punctuation	Must be enclosed in inverted commas.
Direct speech before a verb	Use a comma after the direct speech (inside the inverted commas), verb begins with inverted comma and lower case letter.
Direct speech after a verb	Use a comma after the verb (outside the inverted commas), direct speech begins with inverted comma and a capital letter.
Split direct speech – one sentence	Use a comma/exclamation/question mark inside inverted comma to conclude first part of speech. Verb starts with lower case letter, followed by comma outside inverted commas. Direct speech resumes with an inverted comma and a lower case letter.
Split direct speech – two sentences	Use a comma/exclamation/question mark inside inverted comma to conclude first part of speech. Verb starts with lower case letter, followed by full stop. Direct speech resumes with an inverted comma and a capital letter.

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