

## Italics or Quotation Marks?

Getting quotation marks and italics right keeps your academic writing clear and professional. Use them carefully to distinguish direct quotes, titles, and special terms. Remember that UK and US rules are not the same, so always check which system you are expected to follow.

### Quotation Marks (“ ” or ‘ ’)

Before discussing what should be placed in quotation marks, it is important to clarify the stylistic difference between “” and “. This distinction is largely regional.

#### UK English:

Generally prefers single quotation marks for main text, with double quotation marks used for quotations within quotations.

- He said, ‘She told me, “I’m leaving now.”’

#### US English:

Typically uses double quotation marks for main text, with single quotation marks used inside a quotation.

- He said, “She told me, ‘I’m leaving now.’”

This Scrib.bit follows UK conventions, meaning single quotation marks are used throughout. If you are writing according to US style conventions, remember to apply double quotation marks instead.

### When to use quotation marks

Use quotation marks for the exact words spoken or written by someone else.

- She said, ‘The results were unexpected.’
- ‘Follow me!’ the guide called.

Direct quotations always use quotation marks. When a direct quotation appears inside another direct quotation, the style of quotation marks is inverted.

- **UK:** ‘Did you just say “groundbreaking research”?’
- **US:** “Did you just say ‘groundbreaking research’?”

Use the following quick reference guide:

- Outer quotation → your main style (double in US, single in UK)
- Inner quotation → the opposite style



### Short works

Short works (articles, essays, chapters, and poems) use quotation marks, not italics. Italics are reserved for standalone, published works, while quotation marks indicate works that form part of a larger whole.

- The short story, 'The Tell-Tale Heart,' explores the narrator's descent into madness.
- 'Ode to a Nightingale' is one of Keats's most famous poems.
- The chapter 'Rising Tensions' in the textbook outlines the causes of the French Revolution.



As with embedded quotations, when the title of a short work appears within a direct quotation, the same rule applies: quotation marks are inverted.

- UK: 'Did you read "The Tell-Tale Heart"?' he asked.
- US: "Did you read 'The Tell-Tale Heart'?" he asked.

### Special terms/jargon (first use):

Quotation marks may be used when introducing specialized terms or jargon for the first time.

- The term 'critical mass' is often misunderstood.
- The concept of 'intersectional feminism' highlights how overlapping identities shape experiences of inequality.
- Foucault uses the term 'discourse' to describe systems of knowledge that structure power relations.

After the first mention, these terms should appear without quotation marks. If you are following a specific style guide, always double check this rule.

### Italics

Fun fact: Italics were first invented in the early sixteenth century by Aldus Manutius, a Venetian printer, to save space and improve readability in printed texts. Today, italics remain an important tool in academic writing. Let's look at when to use them.

### Titles of long works:

**Titles of long, standalone works – such as books, journals, plays, and films – are written in italics.**

- *Pride and Prejudice* is often read in English literature classes.
- *Rocky* won Best Picture over *Taxi Driver* at the Academy Awards in 1977.
- *The Tempest* is generally considered to be Shakespeare's last play.

**Foreign words:**

Foreign words and phrases that have not been assimilated (fully absorbed) into English are usually written in italics.

- The concept of *zeitgeist* is often debated.
- The poem evokes a sense of *joie de vivre* that characterizes the French Romantic period.
- Many scholars refer to the concept of *tabula rasa* when discussing human cognition.

**Emphasis (use sparingly):**

Overuse of italics for emphasis can weaken academic tone.

- This result is *especially* significant.
- The experiment demonstrates only a correlation, *not* a causal relationship.
- The heliocentric idea appeared *before* Copernicus.

**Variables and species names:**

Italics are used for variables in mathematical and scientific expressions and for scientific (Latin) names of species.

- $E = mc^2$  shows that mass can be converted into energy.
- *Homo sapiens* developed complex language and culture.
- *Arabidopsis thaliana* is widely used as a model organism in plant biology.

Note: In scientific names, the genus is capitalized and the species is lowercase; both are italicized. Common names (for example, humans or *Arabidopsis*) are not italicized.

**Italics for vehicles****Ships**

Names of ships are italicized.

- *Titanic* sank in 1912.
- *HMS Beagle* carried Charles Darwin on his voyage.

**Trains:**

Names of trains are usually italicized.

- *Orient Express* travels from Paris to Istanbul.

**Planes / Aircraft:**

Names of planes are generally not italicized; just write them in regular text.

- The Boeing 747 made its first commercial flight in 1970.
- Concorde was a supersonic passenger jet.

**Tip:** Think of italics as highlighting named, individual vehicles treated as proper nouns in history or literature. As a general rule, ships and trains take italics; planes usually do not. If it sails or rails, italicize it, if it flies, don't.

Quotation marks	Italics
Direct quotations	Long works (books, films, journals)
Short works (articles, poems, chapters)	Foreign words (not naturalized)
Specialized terms (first use)	Species names
Quotes within quotes (inverted) UK: 'single' US: "double"	Ships & trains
	Variables & symbols
	Emphasis (very sparingly)
<b>Do NOT use for:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideas or theories</li> <li>• Naturalized foreign words (agenda, café)</li> <li>• Aircraft names</li> </ul>	