

The most common use of parentheses in academic writing is citing information from external sources. A parenthetical usually comes at the end of the sentence or right before a comma.

In this case, where the material within the parentheses **isn't a complete sentence**, the punctuation goes outside the parentheses.

In the novel *Dare Me*, the cheerleader Addy and her teammates practice every day, pushing their bodies to their limits, because “we all want to ‘take it to the next level’—that’s what we keep calling it” (Abbott 41).

Parentheses essentially make a little bubble to set information apart from the rest of the sentence. They create a total separation between the larger sentence and the information contained within them.

Parentheses signal that we're meant to understand the sentence *without* the parenthetical information, implying that the parenthetical is *related but largely irrelevant* to the meaning of the sentence.

The oldest living creature ever recorded was an ocean quahog clam, which died in 2006 (although who knows how much longer it would have lived if the researchers hadn't killed it to find out its age) after swimming off Iceland's shore for five hundred and seven years (see Butler et al. (2013) for the original study).

It's also possible to have a parenthetical that **is its own sentence**, not encased within a larger sentence. In this case, it is punctuated like a full and independent sentence.

The Weasley twins were the only Harry Potter characters I ever really liked. (Fred was my favorite.) So when George had to endure the pain of losing his twin brother and best friend at the end of the series, I was devastated.

In academic writing, parenthetical sentences will probably look more like:

The history of the English language is long, complex, and fascinating. (Stephan Gramley's 2012 book *The History of English: An Introduction* is an excellent chronological overview of the development of English.)

## In summary:

- If the parenthetical is **part of a larger sentence**, then the sentence housing the parenthetical takes care of the punctuation—commas, periods, and anything else will go *outside* the parentheses.
- If the parenthetical **stands on its own as a sentence** without being encased in any larger sentence, then it is punctuated as its own entity—commas, periods, etc. will go *inside* the parentheses.

## ● Parentheses and Citation ●

In academia, the most common parentheses use will of course be citing external sources. The main citation styles that rely heavily on parenthetical in-text citations are MLA and APA.

**MLA Citation** is normally used for English papers and related fields. Following outside material, MLA requires a parenthetical citation including the author's name and a page number.

In *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice's descent into her strange dream begins with her decision to follow the White Rabbit down the rabbit hole, "never once considering how in the world she was to get out again" (Carroll 3).

Note that the parenthetical falls outside the quotes, and that the period is outside the parentheses.

**APA Citation** is more often used in the social sciences. It requires the year of publication to follow the author's name within your sentence, and it also involves the page number at the end of the quote.

In his novel *Alice in Wonderland*, Carroll (1866) shows his character Alice, a young and imaginative child, learning to believe in the unlikely when she thinks that "so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible" (p. 9).

Note that in APA, if the author isn't mentioned within your sentence, the whole citation can come in the ending parenthetical:

The character Alice, a young and imaginative child, learns to believe in the unlikely when she thinks that "so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible" (Carroll, 1866, p. 9).

**There is much more to MLA and APA citation!** This only covers in-text parenthetical citations: for more MLA and APA information, please look up sources specifically on those.