How to Use Curly Quotes on Mac OSX and Windows

Published on February 11, 2013.

The curly, or smart quote is an elusive character. For years I have been including straight marks in my writing, blissfully unaware that I was doing it all wrong. Recently, I learned about some functional differences between straight and curly quotation marks.

Straight marks

Straight marks were invented for use on typewriters. Due to physical and mechanical constraints, you can only fit so many keys on a typewriter's keyboard. Using straight quotes instead of curly quotes freed up two slots for other characters on the keyboard, which is why these characters were preferable.

When computers came into the fray, they put these straight marks to good use. Most programming languages require the use

of straight marks to indicate string literals (e.g. “Hello world”), so they are still very useful today.

Usage

On any typical keyboard, simply press `'` for a straight single mark (‘) and `Shift` + `'` for a straight double mark (“).

Curly quotes

Unlike straight marks, curly quotes are usually more legible in paragraphs and long texts, and match the other characters better. They are more suitable for reading, and should be used when writing documents, articles, blog posts, etc.

Usage

It turns out that producing curly quotes on a computer is super easy. I’ve committed these simple shortcuts to memory.

Mac OSX

- `Alt` + `]` produces an opening single curly quote (‘)
- `Alt` + `Shift` + `]` produces a closing single curly quote (’)
- `Alt` + `[` produces an opening double curly quote (“)
- `Alt` + `Shift` + `[` produces a closing double curly quote (

”)

Windows

- `Alt` + `0145` produces an opening single curly quote (‘)
- `Alt` + `0146` produces a closing single curly quote (’)
- `Alt` + `0147` produces an opening double curly quote (“)
- `Alt` + `0148` produces a closing double curly quote (”)

Converting straight marks to curly quotes

Some word processors like Microsoft Word will automatically convert straight marks to curly quotes for you on the fly, as you type. However, if you copy and paste text that includes straight marks into a word processor, it may not always convert the straight marks properly.

To manually convert straight marks to curly quotes within your word processor, simply use the **search and replace** function to find all instances of the straight single quote (') and replace it with the same character — a straight single quote ('). You can do the same for straight double marks (") too.

I'm not sure why, but it works.

Who cares?

These small details in your writing will go unnoticed by most, no doubt. Snobby typographers, bookworms, and other designers and developers will be among the few who may actually notice. And maybe that significant other you dated back in 2006 who majored in creative writing.

Either way, I like to believe that the devil is in the details. The subtleties of these pesky quotation marks is an interesting tidbit in type history worth rehashing.

Leave a Comment

Comments Community Privacy Policy

Recommend 11 Sort by Best

Join the discussion…

espiekermann · 7 years ago

Straight quotes are not quotes. They are inch ' marks or foot " marks or represent a prime (which should look a little different). Only “curly” quotes deserve that name. And, of course, they’re different in different languages. Quotes can also look like this « … ». Or like this » … « In

German, we use „ … “.

16 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Sean ➚ espiekermann · 5 years ago

Another practical reason to use curly quotes (aka smart quotes) in computer code, instead of straight marks (aka dumb quotes), is that often a straight mark is used to define variables. Just unravelled a tricky problem where a field was being defined by what was between the single (dumb quote) marks. When the content included the word "can't" with a dumb mark, the code didn't know want to make of the rest of the line of text that followed the mark, and it produced an error. Using a curly quote fixed the problem.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Chris B. Author ➚ espiekermann · 7 years ago

Hi Erik! Thanks for the tweet, clarification, and additions. I’ve changed all instances of “straight quotes” to “straight marks” in this entry.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

point ➚ Chris B. · 7 years ago

Erik is right, of course. In the type design industry, this is good terminology. However, I would argue that it is acceptable to call straight marks “quotes”, at least in the U.S. and maybe other countries too. Why? For a number of reasons. In no order: English is a very dynamic language. It is one of its

very dynamic language. It is one of its greatest assets. Names of things change all the time. Connected to that is the popular usage of the word quotes to straight marks. Well, it is what people call it so, let's not fight the tide so much (you simply cannot win…)

Regardless, the reality is that these marks, whatever you call them, were used as "quotes" on typewriter written documents for about 100 years. Many millions (billions?) of pages in business, personal letters, literature, police reports, speeches about having a dream that altered the fate of millions, etc. They were called quotes. They are quotes. They will always be called quotes.

But, nowadays, you do not need to use them. So please do use real quotes (unless you are typing a memo on an antique Smith Corona or really tired and it is just an email or tweet).

Here is the big question: on the iOS, how the hell does one use real quotes (they ARE there) with the on screen keyboard? I tried typing with Siri saying stuff like: The kid said "I am hungry." spoken in various ways, open quote, start quote, close quote, end quote, etc. But nothing works. If you say quote, Siri types the straight marks. If you copy text that uses real quotes, they do paste into anything in iOS and, obviously,

the BT keyboard does them too.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Niels Saavedra ➚ point
· 4 years ago · edited

100% agree, and ¡Ťẗ̊åñǩš! made my day)

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

espiekermann ➚ point
· 7 years ago

Just hold down the key and the choices will turn up. Just like Umlauts and accents.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

point ➚ espiekermann
· 7 years ago

Erik - Holly crap! I should have known this as I am aware of it for .com, et al. However, not using Umlauts or accents in English at all, I just did not make the connection for quotes. ¡Ťẗ̊åñǩš!

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

espiekermann ➚ point
· 7 years ago

Stupid that Apple didn't make proper quotes the default.

7 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

point ➚ espiekermann
• 7 years ago

Automatic real quotes, apostrophe, ligatures, …, fraction conversion 3/5 to ⅗ in iOS and a warning message before “send” or save when a user types in all caps. Apple could use it as a selling point and call it the “Type Shop” feature. On by default.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

JoGa Bot ➚ espiekermann • 9 months ago

your first sentence bothers me. "straight quotes aren't quotes". don't you ever call something someting and then declare that this something isn't actually this something (but is something else entirely)

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Henry ➚ espiekermann • 6 years ago • edited

How the beginning quote marks look varies by font. Among curly quotes, some fonts have the heavy part (the little "dollop") at the top, others at the bottom.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Stuart Moore • 7 years ago

Don’t forget that the apostrophe is also a closing quote*. Even if the apostrophe is at the beginning of the word, it is still a closing quote.

’09 = right.
‘09 = wrong.

* There is an apostrophe character, but I wouldn’t trust using it.

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Chris B. Author ➚ Stuart Moore
· 7 years ago · edited

Yes that's a good point, thanks Stuart.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Niels Saavedra ➚ Chris B. · 4 years ago

and you use ' instead of ’ in “that's”

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Adam Lee Rosenfeld · 2 years ago

Super-helpful, thanks!

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Guest · 7 years ago

On Linux (Latam layout), I use AltGr+V for “, AltGr+B for ” – add Shift and you get ‘ and ’. In every layout, it lets you insert any Unicode character by pressing Ctrl+Shift+U, then the code point, then Enter/Spacebar.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Arjun · 7 years ago

Wow, what an eye opener! As the saying goes “The highest form of ignorance is when you reject something you don't know anything about.”

you don't know anything about.

Notice the curly quotes :)

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Domenico · 7 years ago

When I was a young student, the first thing I've done when my parents bought me the first Mac is to make a carachter-map and a shortcuts-map. I remember I also printed a catalogue of all fonts installed in it. Two very-first-thing that helped me over the years.

Anyway, on my Macbook Pro shorcuts to make curly quotes are: Alt+" and Alt+Shift+"

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Anakin · 7 years ago

Hmm, my Mac (OS 10.6.8), Germany Keyboard curlys are under:
Alt + 2 and Alt + Shift + 2 ... But thank you it's dead useful!!!

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

idleberg ➚ Anakin · 7 years ago

also: for german opening quotes use Shift+Alt+W

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Chris B. Author ➚ Anakin · 7 years ago

I'm using an English keyboard with OSX 10.8.2, I wasn't aware there was a difference in the keystroke. Thanks for the heads up on that, Anakin :)

Reply · Share ›

jefflundberg · 7 years ago

Alt +] doesn't seem to do anything in Windows (for me at least). I use Alt + keypad[0145] for single quote (right). Hold down the Alt key, and then press 0, 1, 4, and then 5 on the keypad. Then release the Alt key. Alt + keypad[0146] for single quote left. 0147 and 0148 will produce "double-quotes".

1 | Reply · Share ›

Chris B. Author → jefflundberg
· 7 years ago · edited

Jeff, thanks for the clarification, I didn't get a chance to check on Windows yet. You know what they say about assuming...fixing the post now!

Reply · Share ›

point → Chris B. · 7 years ago

I am no Windows expert, so take this with a grain of salt but, I think it depends on version and possibly the application and possibly the app or system settings. But the Alt + (number) works on all of them. Time consuming. Like on OSX, most apps in Windows let you do automatic real quotes. Much easier and then, if one is typed that is not needed, manually correct to inch or foot mark in editing. (I just type inch/in or ft/foot/feet to avoid it.)

Reply · Share ›

JoGa Bot · 9 months ago

great...thanks for the level up!

Reply · Share ›

Wendy · a year ago

what key is "Alt" on Mac?

Reply · Share ›

Sukriti Kumra · 2 years ago

how can i insert curly quotes while typing on typing software. plz do help me

Reply · Share ›

Viktor Torma · 2 years ago

it can cause problems in programming (parsing string). Because these quote types count as different characters. We've experienced problems when parsing JSON's coming from mac.

Reply · Share ›

Paul · 3 years ago

FYI: There is no "alt" key on a Mac keyboard.

Reply · Share ›

Robintvale · 3 years ago

Doesn't work in Windows ten's word.

Reply · Share ›

ozeroffbooks · 4 years ago

RE: Converting straight quotes to curly quotes. Search

RE: Converting straight quotes to curly quotes. Search and replace straight quotes for curly quotes gives me all curly quotes in the same direction, regardless if they're at the beginning or ending of a word. I'm using Pages in OS X El Capitan 10.11.1. Any ideas how to get them all curly but facing the right direction?

Reply · Share ›

YouON · 6 years ago

I don't understand (on a Mac) the command ALT +] because I do the square bracket exactly with ALT. In addition ALT + SHIFT +] generates } a curly bracket... can someone clarify me this simple thing?

Reply · Share ›

Henry ➚ YouON · 6 years ago

MAC
Single quote:
beginning: Option +] = ‘
ending: Option + Shift +] = ’

Double quotes:
beginning: Option + [= “
ending: Option + Shift + [= ”

Reply · Share ›

Chris B. Author ➚ YouON · 6 years ago

It might be different for non-English keyboards / keyboard settings.

Reply · Share ›

YouON ➚ Chris B. • 6 years ago

You're right on Italian keyboard I have to do with ALT + 2 and ALT + SHIFT + 2 or ALT + q ... thanks :)

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Chris B. Author ➚ YouON
• 6 years ago

Thank you for sharing! I'm sure others will benefit from knowing this info.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Subscribe Add Disqus Do Not Sell My Data DISQUS

CC BY-SA 4.0 · 2012-2019 · RSS Feed