

Recognizing Complete and Incomplete Quote Introductions

If you're struggling to tell if something is a complete or incomplete thought, try reading it aloud. Does the statement feel finished, or like it was cut short?

Here are some examples of complete and incomplete thoughts:

- Complete:** The girls went to the park.
- Complete:** It's raining. I'm cold. Are you hungry?
- Incomplete:** Jumping up and down, spinning in circles.
- Incomplete:** On the radio with a loud voice.

Colons introduce full-sentence quotes after complete thoughts.

Matt looked me in the eye : "I will beat you in Monopoly."

Complete thought colon full sentence quote

Commas introduce full-sentence quotes after incomplete thoughts.

Matt looked me in the eye and said , "I will beat you in Monopoly."

fragment (incomplete thought) speech/thought word comma full sentence quote

Complete or Incomplete Thought?

Inspecting my jetpack, David Schwimmer asked, “Can you make me one, too?”

INCOMPLETE THOUGHT

After the movie, Captain America said what everyone was thinking: “Why did the main character have a pet platypus?”

COMPLETE THOUGHT

Clinging to the spinning tire swing, Cinderella cried, “I’m getting dizzy!”

INCOMPLETE THOUGHT



Punctuation and Capitalization with “Colon Quotes”

Colon quotes are introduced by complete thoughts. They connect a full-sentence introduction to a full-sentence quote.

Readers take a long pause before colon quotes. To highlight that pause, do the following:

1. Offset the quote with a **colon**
2. Begin the quote with a **capital letter**

Matt had only one thing to say **:** **“We will beat you in Monopoly.”**
Complete thought Colon Capital Letter

Al stood tall as he made the announcement **:** **“School is cancelled!”**
Complete thought Colon Capital Letter

Dialogue quotes require less of a pause because they’re introduced by *incomplete* thoughts. Words like “said” and “wondered” come before dialogue quotes.

Include a comma before **dialogue quotes** and start the quote with a capital letter.

Matt said loudly **,** **“We will beat you in Monopoly.”**
Incomplete thought Comma Capital Letter

After the movie, Lucy asked hopefully **,** **“Is there any popcorn left?”**
Incomplete thought Comma Capital Letter

Add or remove punctuation

Jesse smiled shyly and said: “we baked you a chocolate cake for your birthday.”

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The detective asked Jay-Z for help, “Did you see anything unusual last night?”

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The scientists checked Payten’s work and cheered: “you found the solution!”

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