

## A Word, Please By June Casagrande



is lost!

It's starting to look like dialogue, right? Like the words after the name Michael are not me talking but in fact are Michael's own words.

Naturally, if I added quotation marks, all doubt would be erased.

Michael: "The incident has already been reported."

But the quote marks would be wrong. For dialogue, according to both the Associated Press Stylebook and the Chicago Manual of Style, from which I lifted this Michael-Timothy dialogue verbatim, you should use only a colon and no quotation marks.

Yet a colon could mean the opposite. Sometimes colons are used to indicate you're addressing someone directly. You see this most often in correspondence — emails, letters and the like.

Michael: I hope you're well.

If this were the first line in an email, the reader would

Michael: The incident has already been reported.

When you see that sentence, do you think that I'm talking to Michael, or do you think that Michael said that and I'm quoting him?

What if we added one more line for context?

Michael: The incident has already been reported.

Timothy: Then, sir, all

know immediately who's talking. Plus, if you throw in a word before Michael like "dear" or "hey," you erase all doubt. Dear Michael: I hope you're well.

It's a small miracle that this system doesn't cause more problems. We can usually infer who's talking from the context. For example, when we see a news headline that says, "Biden: You can't have the strongest economy in the world with a second-rate infrastructure," we know that it's probably not someone at the newspaper speaking directly to Joe Biden but instead a shorthand way of attributing the quote to the president himself. Even if that's not immediately clear, it usually takes no more than a sentence or two for the reader to understand who's talking.

It's a pretty good system, usually.

But it didn't work out so well for Monica Ciardi, a New Jersey mom who went on Facebook to vent about the way two judges handled her child-custody dispute with her ex-husband. Among Ciardi's many angry posts was this one: "Judge Bogaard and Judge DeMarzo: If you don't do what I want then you don't get to see your kids. Hmm."

Soon after, local police swarmed Ciardi's house, handcuffed her and put her in jail, where she would spend the next 35 days for "terroristic threats, harassment and retaliation against a public official," according to the New Jersey Monitor.

Ciardi says she wasn't speaking to the judges — wasn't harassing them or threatening them on her 50-follower Facebook account. She was instead paraphrasing the judges' words and actions as she interpreted them — summing up the jurists' implicit message.

"She got arrested because she forgot quotation marks," Ciardi's public defender, Mackenzie Shearer, told the paper.

Yes, quotation marks could have prevented the whole unfortunate incident. But technically you can't forget a punctuation mark if it was never required in the first place.

Before social media, pretty much the only people getting published were journalists and authors — trained professionals with experience in clear, unambiguous, not-legally-fraught communication. Today, everyone's a content creator, writing about their lives and broadcasting their opinions in public forums. But most social media users lack the training and experience to understand how to prevent potentially catastrophic ambiguities.

It's not hard to imagine a private citizen sitting in her living room, venting in a sarcastic voice to friends: "Ugh! Those judges! They're all like, 'If you don't do what I want then you don't get to see your kids.'"

Nor is it hard to imagine someone who actually did mean the judges harm using the same words in a different tone of voice. Either way, the listeners would get the speaker's meaning.

The lesson here: Whenever punctuation — even unnecessary punctuation — could add greater clarity to your writing, use it.

— June Casagrande is the author of *"The Joy of Syntax: A Simple Guide to All the Grammar You Know You Should Know."* She can be reached at [JuneTCN@aol.com](mailto:JuneTCN@aol.com).

# Lanier County News

Covering Lanier & Northern Lowndes Counties

"Serving our community and protecting our freedoms according to His Word since 1913"

Greetings,

Thank you for considering LCN as a way of distributing your message, business offerings, products and the like. Below you will find information concerning the scope of our reach and the readership of our products. We have multiple venues that we can promote by.

### (1) Lanier County News E-Edition

A broadsheet-formatted e-edition that is distributed by paid e-edition subscriptions only. Currently we show 299 E-Subscription accounts.

### (2) LCN's Online

[www.laniercountynewsonline.com](http://www.laniercountynewsonline.com) showing traffic for the last month of 34,867 sessions and 33,509 users.

### (3) LCN's Facebook Page

The overview of the LCN Facebook Page for the last 28 days shows the following information.

- **2,054 Page Followers**
- **1,500 Page Likes**
- **14,164 Post Reach**

(The number of people who see any of your posts at least once. Reach is different from impressions, which may include multiple views of your posts by the same people.)

- **11,831 Post Engagement**

(The number of reactions, comments, shares and clicks on your posts.)

- **36 New Page Likes**

(The number of new Page Likes in the last 28 days.)

Considering the demographics of our local area are as follows

Lakeland, GA population = 2,691

Lanier County, GA population = 9,817

Total population of Lakeland/Lanier = 12,508

Total adult population of Lakeland/Lanier = 8,177

We are proud of our ability to blanket the local area with news, announcements, business advertising and the like.

We look forward to assisting you with your message needs.

**Contact us at**  
**[webmaster@laniercountynewsonline.com](mailto:webmaster@laniercountynewsonline.com)**