

Alexander  
English 109, 110, and 111: Introduction to Effective Use of Quotations

## I. USING QUOTATIONS FOR SUPPORT

The following information should make easier your incorporation of quotations in a paper for support. (N.B. “quotation” is the noun; “quote” is the verb.) Quotations should always be documented (here parenthetically) and integrated into your writing. A quotation that stands by itself (a “floating quotation”) may not clearly support your topic sentence and certainly will negatively affect your prose.

You are ordinarily expected to use a combination of quotations and paraphrases (or summaries) from primary and sometimes secondary sources as support in an analytical essay or paper. Paraphrases of brief, specific, concrete examples (or summaries of longer examples) are generally preferable to quotations. Such paraphrases and summaries illustrate that you understand the material being referenced, and the paraphrase, since it is in your own words, will be less disruptive of your prose than a quotation would be.

Often, however, an apt quotation is supportive, especially if its wording is such that a paraphrase would not be as emphatic. To be effective, a quotation must be appropriate to the point you are making, and it should be as brief as possible. Avoid using too many quotations or quotations that are longer than they need to be. You can effectively blend paraphrases and quotations to minimize the length of quotations. Your reader is interested in what you have to say about the subject; you must not give the impression that you are padding your paper with excessive quoted matter.

Note that quotations must be exact copies from the original—word for word, period for period, space for space. Changing wording or punctuation is not being true to the original. Consider whether or not the material could be more effectively paraphrased. Likewise, if more than three words in a row are taken from a source, the reference cannot be considered a paraphrase; it must be quoted.

In using quotations, follow these recommendations:

1. PROSE QUOTATIONS THAT ARE FOUR TYPED LINES OR SHORTER (including quotations from a prose translation of a poem) are to be included as part of your paragraph, enclosed in quotation marks, and followed by a page reference in parentheses. Note the following example:

Example 1:

**Achilles’ treatment of Hector’s corpse is brutal, but, as Sarah Lawall, editor of the *Norton Anthology*, explains, “we are never allowed to forget that this inflexible hatred is the expression of his love for Patroclus” (95).**

Notes:

- In addition to quoting in a paper from a primary source (here Homer’s *Iliad*), this paper is quoting from a secondary source, another writer’s commentary on the primary source. Both the primary and any secondary sources will need entries on a Works Cited Page.
- Although you will often be quoting from primary sources in English 109, 110, and 111, you may occasionally find another’s criticism helpful. If so, consult with me about using secondary sources. Information from any source can be quoted, paraphrased, or summarized; however, to avoid the serious violation of copyright, to give credit to the author of the secondary source, to be honest in your work (and thus to exhibit good skills of scholarship), and to avoid a charge of plagiarism, you must cite sources in a parenthetical reference and include complete bibliographic information on the source on a Works Cited Page. See also the *PC Honor System Blue Book* and Chapters 51-60 in the *Prentice Hall Guide to Grammar and Usage* for further guidelines.
- The above quotation begins in the middle of the source’s sentence; hence, the quotation begins with a lower case letter. If you were quoting an entire sentence, you would begin with an upper case letter.

- Ellipses (. . .) are used to indicate that you are omitting material from the middle or end of a sentence that you're quoting. No ellipses are needed at the beginning of a quotation, even if you are omitting words from the beginning of a quoted sentence.
  - Sarah Lawall's last name is not needed in the parenthetical citation because her name has been mentioned in your attribution. In general, introduce quotations by attributing them to their source, eliminating the need for all but the page number in parentheses.
2. PROSE QUOTATIONS OF MORE THAN FOUR TYPED LINES are to be separated from your paragraph by indenting at least five spaces from the left margin. Such a format is known as a *block quotation*. No quotation marks are needed unless you have a quotation within your quotation (see point #5 below). No extra line spaces are needed to separate the quotation from the rest of your paragraph when the paper is double-spaced. The block quotations themselves, whether in prose (as here) or in verse (as below) may be either single- or double-spaced.

Example 2:

**In an attempt to explain one of the major themes of *The Iliad*, Sarah Lawall states that the two poles of the human condition, war and peace, and their corresponding aspects of human nature, the destructive and the creative, are implicit in every situation and statement of the poem, and they are put before us, in symbolic form, in the shield that the god Hephaestus makes for Achilles. (95)**

Note: Parenthetical citations come after the end punctuation in block quotations. They come before the end punctuation in briefer quotations (see example 1 above).

3. VERSE QUOTATION OF THREE OR FEWER LINES are to be run on as part of your paragraph and enclosed in quotation marks. If the quotation is of more than one line, a front slash (/) is used to indicate where one line of verse ends and another begins.

Example 3:

**Upon learning of the death of Agamemnon, the Chorus cries out in shock to Clytaemnestra, "Demon of sudden destruction, / Laying the house in the dust forever!" (1515-1516).**

Notes:

- Poems and plays in verse are cited by line numbers (example 3 above), while prose works are cited by page numbers (examples 1 and 2 above).
  - If a quotation that is documented parenthetically ends with a period or a comma, the period or comma is omitted before the end quotation marks, whether the source is in prose or verse (see Examples 1 and 2 above). If the end punctuation of the original source is a question mark or an exclamation point, the mark of punctuation is retained for emphasis (as with Example 3 above).
4. VERSE QUOTATIONS OF MORE THAN THREE LINES are to be treated as a block quotation and are thus similar to block quotations of prose. Insofar as possible, reproduce the lines as they appear in the original source.

Example 4:

**In a preface to one of his speeches, Orestes explains to Athena and the Furies, I have suffered into truth. Well I know the countless arts of purging, where to speak, where silence is the rule. In this ordeal a compelling master urges me to speak. (274-77)**

5. QUOTATIONS WITHIN QUOTATIONS occur frequently when the source you are quoting itself contains quotations, usually in the form of dialogue. If your quotation is in quotation marks (" "), the

internal quotation will be in single quotation marks ( ‘ ’ ). If your quotation is a block quotation, and thus contains no quotation marks, double quotation marks should be used.

Example 5:

**After the embassy to Achilles fails, Diomedes tells Agamemnon, “if only you’d never begged the dauntless son of Peleus, / holding out to Achilles trove on trove of gifts!” (9.851-52).**

Example 6:

**After Achilles refuses to listen to Odysseus’ attempt to persuade him to return to fight for the Greek cause, Ajax tells Achilles,**

**“You—the gods have planted  
a cruel, relentless fury in your chest! All for a girl,  
just one, and here we offer you seven—outstanding beauties—  
that, and a treasure trove besides.” (9.778-81)**

## II. PUNCTUATING QUOTATIONS

ALWAYS INTRODUCE QUOTATIONS AND INTEGRATE THEM INTO YOUR PROSE. Introductions usually attribute the quotation to its speaker and briefly establish the context of the quoted material. Be certain to use correct punctuation when introducing a quotation. A quotation may be introduced using a colon, a comma, or no punctuation mark at all, depending on the grammatical structure of the sentence in which it appears. Though we set off certain “tag phrases” of attribution with commas (e.g., she said, he notes, she argues, he asks, etc.), entire sentences of introduction are always set off with a colon. Note the following examples:

Example 7:

**As Sheridan Baker notes, the importance of a good introduction cannot be overstressed in essay writing:**

**You can usually blame a bad essay on a bad beginning. If your essay falls apart, it probably has no primary idea to hold it together. “What’s the big idea?” we used to ask. The phrase will serve as a reminder that you must find the “big idea” behind your several smaller thoughts and musings before you start to write. (245)**

Example 8:

**The importance of a good introduction cannot be overstressed in essay writing. Sheridan Baker has aptly noted that one**

**can usually blame a bad essay on a bad beginning. If your essay falls apart, it probably has no primary idea to hold it together. “What’s the big idea?” we used to ask. The phrase will serve as a reminder that you must find the “big idea” behind your several smaller thoughts and musings before you start to write. (245)**

Example 9:

**The importance of a good introduction cannot be overstressed in essay writing. As Sheridan Baker has noted, “You can usually blame a bad essay on a bad beginning” (245).**

### FURTHER EXAMPLES:

Incorrect: **Sheridan Baker has noted that: “You can usually blame a bad essay on a bad beginning” (245).**

Correct: **Sheridan Baker has noted that “You can usually blame a bad essay on a bad beginning” (245).**

Incorrect: **Baker says: “You can usually blame a bad essay on a bad beginning” (245).**

Correct: **Baker says, “You can usually blame a bad essay on a bad beginning” (245).**

Incorrect: **Baker sums up a major problem with essays, “You can usually blame a bad essay on a bad beginning” (245).**

Note: The last example illustrates a serious error, the comma splice. If you introduce a quotation with a complete thought, use a colon, as in the following correction:

Correct: **Baker sums up a major problem with essays: “You can usually blame a bad essay on a bad beginning” (245).**

Further Notes:

The guidelines above can be supplemented by the *Prentice Hall Reference Guide to Grammar and Usage*, chapters 31 and 51-60. All recommendations are in keeping, as far as possible, with Modern Language Association (MLA) guidelines for documenting sources in papers. You may be required to follow other standards (*Chicago Manual of Style*, CBE, or APA, for example) in other classes. Follow the guidelines appropriate to the discipline in which you are writing.

1. Often long poems are subdivided into “Books” or “Cantos,” and plays are frequently divided into acts and scenes. If you are quoting from such a work, include book, canto, act, or scene number before line numbers. For example, if you are quoting the opening lines of Homer’s *Odyssey*, cite the first two lines of the first book as follows:

**The poem begins, “Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story / of that man skilled in all ways of contending” (1.1-2).**

2. Lines from a Shakespeare play would be cited as follows, the numbers in parentheses referring to act number, scene number, and line numbers:

**In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock asks, “If you prick us, do we not bleed?” (3.1.61).**

3. Quotation marks are also used to punctuate titles of short written works, e.g., essays, magazine articles, short poems, one-act plays, or short films. Titles of longer works such as books, magazines, long poems, plays of more than a single act, feature-length films, or any work published as an independent work are either underlined or italicized (underlining and italics mean the same and should be used consistently in your writing). Note the following example:

**The Iliad by Homer is a challenging work to read. Bernard Malamud’s short story “The Magic Barrel” is much easier to read.**

**Did you read the article “They Just Won’t Grow Up” in the most recent edition of *Time*?**

4. If parenthetical documentation is not used, American printer standards place periods and commas inside quotation marks, semi-colons and colons outside quotation marks, and question marks in either position, depending on whether your entire sentence or just the quoted part is a question. Note the following examples:
  - a. **The coach told us to “clean up our act,” or we would be cut from the team.**
  - b. **The coach told us to “clean up our act”; otherwise, we would be cut from the team.**
  - c. **Do you have any questions about the story we read, “The Magic Barrel”?**
  - d. **The teacher asked us, “Who has read the assignment?”**