

Using Quotations

To support your ideas for analytical essays or papers in English and other classes in the humanities, you may use a combination of paraphrase, summaries, and quotations from primary and secondary sources. Paraphrases of brief, specific, concrete examples or summaries of longer examples are generally preferable to quotations because they show that you understand the material and are less disruptive of your own prose than a quotation. Check with your instructor about whether to document paraphrases and summaries in a particular essay or paper. See the Using Sources handout on the Writing Center website for an explanation of paraphrases and summaries.

Sometimes, however, an apt quotation is appropriate. To be effective, a quotation must be appropriate to the point you are making and as brief as possible. Avoid using too many quotations or quotations that are longer than they need to be. Always document quotations (quotation is the noun; quote is the verb) and integrate them into your writing. A quotation that stands by itself, a "floating quotation," may leave the reader wondering what connection it has to your topic. See Citing Sources on the Writing Center website for information on citing sources in various disciplines.

Quotations must be word for word, period for period, space for space exact copies of the original. If more than three words in a row are taken from a source, the words should be in quotation marks. Follow these recommendations for using quotations in MLA Style:

- Enclose prose quotations of four lines or less: in quotation marks and write them as part of the paragraph, followed by the reference in parentheses and then a period.

Example: Achilles' treatment of Hector's corpse is brutal, but the editors of the *Norton Anthology* explain, "We are never allowed to forget that his inflexible hatred is the expression of of his love for Patroclus" (95). Note that if you mention the author in your text, you need only list the page number in your reference (or line numbers if you are quoting poetry).

- Set off prose quotations of more than four lines by indenting ten spaces or one inch from the left margin. Do not use quotation marks. Continue to double space. Put a period or other end punctuation after the quotation, not after the parenthetical reference. See the *MLA Handbook* in the Writing Center for examples.
- Enclose verse quotations of three or fewer lines in quotation marks and write as part of the paragraph. Use a front slash / to indicate where one line of verse ends. Space before and after the slash.

Example: Upon learning of Agamemnon's murder, the Chorus cries to Clytaemnestra, "Woman made him suffer / woman struck him down" (1484-85). Note that line numbers are used to cite quotations from verse.

- Set off verse quotations of more than three lines by indenting ten spaces or one inch unless unusual spacing is part of the poem. Try to reproduce the lines as they appear in the original source. Use only quotation marks that are part of the original.

Example: 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)

Weave each quotation into your text:

- Hamlet says to Ophelia, "Get thee to a nunnery" (3.1.119). Note that the numbers stand for act 3, scene 1, line 119. Set off a quotation introduced by an expression such as *he says* with a comma.
- Hamlet makes a shocking statement: "Get thee to a nunnery" (3.1.119). Set off a quotation following a complete sentence with a colon.
- Hamlet shocks others by the rude type of command he often makes: "Get thee to a nunnery" (3.1.119).

Sometimes the quotation fits into your sentence with no need for commas.

- "Get thee to a nunnery" is what Hamlet says (3.1.119).
- Hamlet says that Ophelia should "Go thy ways to a nunnery" (3.1.126). A capital letter shows that the quotation begins a sentence.
- Hamlet tells Ophelia to go "to a nunnery" (3.1.126).

Use book and line numbers or act and line numbers to cite lines from a long poem, a play, or an epic.

Example from an epic:

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

Example from a play:

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare presents the most famous soliloquy in the history of the theater: "To be, or not to be . . ." (3.1.56-89).

Note the use of ellipsis points, three spaced periods, to indicate the omission of words at the end or in the middle of a quotation. If you omit words from the beginning of a quotation, no points are needed. Come to the Writing Center to discuss the use of quotations in your paper with a tutor.

Questions you might want to consider:

- Do my quotations support my points?
- Are they longer than necessary?
- Do I rely too much on quotations, instead of using paraphrase or summary?
- Are the quotations integrated into my text?
- Have I explained how the quotations support my points?
- Are the quotations in my paper punctuated correctly?
- Are the quotations cited correctly?

Adapted from the handouts "Using Quotations for Support" by Jerry Alexander, English Department, and "Quotation Management" by Rachel Stewart, English Department