

How to Quote from Shakespeare

by Dr. Lynne Simpson, Presbyterian College English Department

Assuming that it is clear from the context of your paper which play you are quoting from, you need not identify the work by its title. At the end of the quotation from Shakespeare, place parentheses, in which you put three numbers, separated by periods. The first number is the act, the second is the scene, and the third the line numbers quoted, the first one and the last one, separated by dash. The parentheses locating the quotation come after the quotation mark and before the punctuation of your own sentence. Here are three examples:

- 1) "So shaken as we are, so wan with care," Henry announces to his court (1.1.1).
- 2) Henry appears infirm from the very beginning of the play: "So shaken as we are, so wan with care" (1.1.1).
- 3) Henry thinks of the terrain of England as a thirsty mother perversely feeding on the blood of her sons: "No more the thirsty entrance of this soil / Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood" (1.1.5-6).

Note the use of the slash (/)—preceded and followed by a space—to separate lines of poetry in example #3. This is standard practice when you are quoting blank verse from Shakespeare into your own text.

Sometimes—though not often in short essays—you will want to quote a larger block of verse, four verse lines or more, which you then should discuss in close, careful detail. Usually this sort of quotation will be introduced by a full colon (:) and then indented ten spaces from your left-hand margin. You will no longer need slashes to separate lines nor quotation marks; instead, the quotation should appear as it does on the printed page.

- 4) Henry's first speech is full of metaphors of physical distress:
So shaken as we are, so wan with care,
Find we a time for frightened peace to pant
And breathe short-winded accents of new broils To be commenced in stronds far
remote. (1.1.1-4)

In this instance, the parentheses locating the quotation follow the final punctuation mark. Note that all citations in parentheses are in Arabic rather than Roman numerals. Do note, finally, that Shakespeare also writes some scenes in prose. You need to know the difference.