

# Principles of Quotation Formatting

## Reference to the Text

The titles of books, plays, and longer and, especially, narrative poems should be placed in italics. The titles of short lyric poems and scholarly or journalistic essays should be placed between quotation marks. The titles of web sites are generally placed in italics.

Examples:

*Hamlet*

*War and Peace*

*The Canterbury Tales*

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day"

"Four Social Functions of the Old English Riddles"

The MLA Style Guide advises the use of underlining as an equivalent to italics for the submission of texts prior to printing, grading, or editing. This is an acceptable alternative, especially if you are using an older medium (handwriting or typewriter) which cannot produce italics. However, with the advent of the word processor, this usage appears somewhat old-fashioned. It is preferable to use italics to give your essay the appearance of a finished, polished product.

## Quoting Prose Passages

Short quotations should normally be integrated into your own sentences. Longer quotations (generally four lines or more) should be indented. An indented quotation does not need to be surrounded by quotation marks.

Examples:

According to Niles, "The art of poetry has not always been practiced at the margins of society" (143).

Niles claims that "what we refer to as poetry could aptly be described as functional speech of a highly wrought, privileged kind" (143).

Niles argues that orally transmitted poetry is closely connected with social power:

In an oral context, what we refer to as poetry could aptly be described as functional speech of a highly wrought, privileged kind. Oral poetic performances are often known for their magnificent displays of technical skill. Perhaps more importantly, however, they constitute a praxis affecting the way people think and act. (143)

## Quoting Poetry

The principles are the same as prose. However, you must indicate where poetic line breaks occur by reproducing them exactly in an indented quotation *or* by indicating them with slashes in an integrated quotation. Never use slashes in an indented quotation.

Examples:

The central arguments against conservative positions are religious ones, and that is what gives the attack on the “lineage” theory of *gentillesse* its boldness:

But, for ye speken of swich gentillesse  
As is descended out of old richesse,  
That therfore sholden ye ben gentil men.  
Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen. (III, 1109-12)

The central arguments against conservative positions are religious ones, and that is what gives the attack on the “lineage” theory of “gentillesse / As is descended out of old richesse” its boldness (III, 1109-10).

## When to Use Quotation Marks and What Type

If your entire quotation comes from dialogue, you only need one set of quotation marks.

Example:

Original Text: “It was sheer accident,” interrupted Frodo.

Essay Quotation: In response, Frodo claims, “It was sheer accident” (161).

If your entire quotation contains some narrative and some dialogue, you must place the entire quotation in double quotation marks and change the quotation marks around the dialogue to single quotation marks.

Example:

Original Text: “It was sheer accident,” interrupted Frodo.  
“I wonder,” said Strider. “Accident, then.”

Essay Quotation: Frodo’s claim that “it was sheer accident” gets the reply, “‘I wonder,’ said Strider. ‘Accident, then.’” (161).

The same principle applies for anything in your quotation that is in quotation marks, even if it does not indicate dialogue.

Example:

Brewer argues that religious arguments are “what gives the attack on the ‘lineage’ theory of *gentillesse* its boldness” (101).

Note that non-US writers often use single quotation marks as their default, and the rule is reversed. If the above sentence were published by, say, a British publisher, it would read:

Brewer argues that religious arguments are ‘what gives the attack on the “lineage” theory of *gentillesse* its boldness’ (101).

An indented quotation containing some material originally in quotation marks and some material not originally in quotation marks should reproduce the punctuation exactly as in the original.

### **Punctuation at the Beginning of a Quotation**

Quotations may be integrated grammatically with the grammar of your sentence or introduced with a comma or colon. If the quotation is introduced with a comma or colon, it should be capitalised; otherwise, it should not, unless the word is a proper name or other word that must be capitalised for independent reasons.

Examples:

Bradley argues, “It is too kind to Hamlet on one side, and it is quite unjust to him on another” (222).

Bradley finds fault with the popular portrayal of Hamlet: “It is too kind to Hamlet on one side, and it is quite unjust to him on another” (222).

Bradley argues that “it is too kind to Hamlet on one side, and it is quite unjust to him on another” (222).

In Bradley’s view, “it is too kind to Hamlet on one side, and it is quite unjust to him on another” (222).

Generally a comma or colon serves an introductory function after words indicating a statement, a claim, or a suggestion. Otherwise, its appearance is dependent on whether the grammar of the sentence requires it.

### **Punctuation at the End of a Quotation**

In general, a quotation must be followed by a reference, as shown in the examples above. When the quotation is not indented, the rules become complicated. If the quotation ends in a comma, semicolon, or period, that punctuation mark should be removed; all other punctuation marks remain. The punctuation should then take the following sequence:

End Quotation Mark      Space      Parenthetic Reference      Period

**Do not omit the space.**

Example:

Original Text: The idea that virtue, rather than ancestry, was true *gentillesse* was often stated by fourteenth-century writers, notably by Dante.

Essay Quotation: According to Brewer, “The idea that virtue, rather than ancestry, was true *gentillesse* was often stated by fourteenth-century writers” (101).

Never put a parenthetic reference inside the quotation marks unless it is part of the quotation.

If you are using footnotes, rather than parenthetic citations. The footnote should always go after the period.

Example:

Essay Quotation: According to Brewer, “The idea that virtue, rather than ancestry, was true *gentillesse* was often stated by fourteenth-century writers”.<sup>1</sup>

## Ellipses

An *ellipsis* is a sequence of three dots (...) which indicates that you have omitted material from the quotation. It should be used to avoid quoting material unnecessary for your argument.

Example:

According to Brewer, “The idea that virtue...was true *gentillesse* was often stated by fourteenth-century writers”.<sup>1</sup>

Older versions of the MLA Style Guide recommend placing the ellipsis in square brackets in order to indicate that they are not part of the original quotation. This practice has been dropped from the most recent edition.

Students are often taught to use an ellipsis at the beginning or end of a quotation to indicate where they have omitted material.

Example:

Original Text: As in the *Franklin’s Tale*, Chaucer combines a vision of marital power-conflicts solved through voluntary forbearance by those to whom rights have been given, with an exploration of social ranks; like the *Franklin’s Tale*, this tale questions whether the *gentil* have, inherently, qualities that non-*gentils* cannot possess.

Essay Quotation: According to Brewer, "...Chaucer combines a vision of marital power-conflicts solved through voluntary forbearance by those to whom rights have been given, with an exploration of social ranks..." (101).

This is not necessary and should be avoided.

## Editorial Modification of Quotations

If you are integrating a quotation into one of your sentences, you may find the result grammatically awkward.

Example:

Original Text: But, for ye speken of swich gentillesse  
As is descended out of old richesse,  
That therfore sholden ye ben gentil men.  
Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen. (III, 1109-12)

Essay Quotation: The Loathly Lady's words are addressed primarily to those who "[descend] out of old richesse" (III, 1110).

The use of brackets indicates that you have kept the word but changed its grammatical form to fit your sentence. Brackets are often used to change proper names to personal pronouns and vice versa.