

English: General Quotation Format

Short prose quotations: A quotation is considered short if it will take up less than three lines of your text. A short quotation should be embedded in the body of your text, which means that it should flow smoothly into your own text and be consistent with your point of view and tense. It must be enclosed with quotation marks.

Examples:

1.

Milton makes this point clear when he says that he "cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary."

2.

Keillor's notion of the complete life is one that focuses above all on "the extreme persistence of gentleness and humor," a phrase in which the writer's use of juxtaposition suggests that life, even at its most harmonious or, for that matter, at its most horrific, is yet filled with contradictions. It should come as no surprise, then, that "even in a time of elephantine vanity and greed, one never has to look far to see the campfires of gentle people."

Long prose quotations: A quotation is considered long if it will take up more than three lines of your text. A quotation this long cannot be smoothly embedded, so it is off-set from your text in a separate paragraph, or paragraphs, by single-spacing (note that your own text is double-spaced), and by indenting five spaces from each margin. No quotation marks are used for off-set quotations.

Examples:

1.

Milton not only believes that readers should have freedom of choice in selecting books but that learning will be endangered by any type of censorship. On the latter point he says this:

Seeing therefore that those books, and those in great abundance, which are likeliest to taint both life and doctrine, cannot be suppressed without the fall of learning, and of all ability in disputation ... and that evil manners are as perfectly learnt without books a thousand other ways which cannot be stopped ... I am not able to unfold how this cautelous enterprise of licensing can be exempted from the number of vain and impossible attempts.

2.

One might suppose that Keillor offers wisdom glibly, that his doctrinaire vision of the meaningful life is built on self-evident truth. The first part of his opening sentence suggests as much:

To know and serve God, of course, is why we're here, a clear truth like that, like the nose on your face, is near at hand and easily discernible

But before the sentence is complete, he has introduced the element of uncertainty. He qualifies an otherwise straightforward assertion by saying that perhaps what ought to be certain is sometimes doubtful—that what ought to be "easily discernible" can make both the foolish and the wise "dizzy if [they] try to focus on it hard."

Short verse quotations: Verse lines from poems or line fragments are embedded in your text in the same way that prose lines are embedded. The only difference is that obliques (/) are used to indicate verse-line breaks.

Examples:

1.
Milton brings us to Satan slowly. At first we see only "his baleful eyes" glowing in the "darkness visible" of nethermost Hell.

2.
In strictest terms, Magee's "High Flight" is about flying an airplane. More broadly, though, it is about rapture—about divinity when it permeates ordinary experience. The speaker is bound to his craft, his mortal-made machine, bound also to fundamental physical laws. Still, the machine allows him to ascend, to "[slip] the surly bonds of earth / And dance the sky on laughter-silvered wings." Here is that place where he can "put out [his] hand and [touch] the face of God."

3.
Nor is the speaker above lording his experience over us. He says flatly and unapologetically that he has "done a hundred things / You have not dreamed of."

Long verse quotations: When quoting more than two verse lines, off-set the quotation, indent five spaces from the left margin, and keep the same layout used in the quoted text.

Examples

1.
Here it is the speaker's aggressive, staccato address balanced against an unexpected, seemingly innocuous observation that most disorients and disturbs the reader:

There's no way I'll tell
You're coming down with me
There's no telling what I'll do
Boy, those pills look good

The casually uttered notice about "those pills" drops heavily, and we know that the danger threatened by the speaker is directed not only outwardly but inwardly, as well.

2.
Consider the voice of August Kleinzahler, whose work often relies on an acute ear for grungy vernacular:

The racket, man
in that arcade—those slob
at toy war go unh, unh night and day ...
Birds just shot through
the arch
screaming,
Jeeeeezuz, my feathers
my pretty little bones ...
I remember
where was that
in Troy I think —
or some dry hill
out west.
It's years now.

Omissions: An omitted portion of a quoted text is indicated with an ellipsis, three spaced periods (...). An ellipsis is not needed at the beginning or end of an embedded quotation.

Examples:

1.

Note what Professor Wood has said about the Spenserian stanza:

None but a born poet could have forged this instrument and used it with success. It combines lyrical sweetness with epic sweep. Each stanza is set off as a metrical unit with a rich and complex music that is ... varied continually.

2.

The narrator depicts Hector's shame and pain by describing him as "stunned, shrunken, humiliated ... [his] life a waste ... [his] poor tired old heart skipping a beat in mortification."

3.

The conclusion of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is simple, unembellished with needless moral pronouncements. Dorian Gray is discovered as, of course, he must be—"a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart ... withered, wrinkled, and loathsome."

Interpolations: These are enclosed by square brackets. The square brackets indicate the addition of explanatory material or a change in the case of a word or phrase to make it fit the grammar of your own text. For example, you will often need to change a pronoun or change the tense of a quoted phrase to fit your own present-tense discourse (which is the conventional mode for critical commentary).

Examples:

1.

At this point Little Jack Horner "[sticks] in his thumb and [pulls] out a plum."

2.

Macbeth's heroic nature is plainly expressed when he says he "cannot fly / But bear-like [he] must fight the course."

3.

At the end of the play, King Henry can forget that he had spoken of Hotspur as

A son who [was] the theme of honour's tongue,
Amongst a grove the very straightest plant;
Who [was] sweet Fortune's minion and her pride.

While Hotspur's credit has waned, madcap Hal's reputation has improved.

4.

As Professor Wood observes, "in the hands of Thomson, Byron, Keats, Shelley, and many later poets, it [the Spenserian stanza] has become the vehicle of some of the most splendid poetry in the English language."

Punctuation:

- * Place commas and periods *inside* the closing quotation marks.
- * Place colons and semi-colons *outside* the closing quotation marks.
- * Place question and exclamation marks *inside* the closing quotation marks if they are part of the quotation, but *outside* if they are part of your own text.

Examples:

- (.) "I have no relish for the country," says Sydney Smith. "It is a kind of healthy grave."
- (.) Pasternak advises, in his autobiography, that one should write to the modern world "in such a way as to make the hair rise and the heart falter."
- (:) Thomas Wolfe refers to three areas as "Dark Helen": the Old South, New England, and Germany.
- (;) "It is as much of a trade," says La Bruyere, "to make a book as it is to make a clock"; in short, literature is largely a matter of technique.
- (?) When Lady Bracknell interrogates Jack about his father, she asks, "Was he born in ... the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?"
(Here the question is **part of the quotation.**)
- What is the use of saying, "Call no man happy till he dies"?
(Here the question is **part of your own text.**)
- (!) Deluded as ever, but exultant, Willy cries, "I was right!"

The following are some examples of poetry and prose quotations incorporated in passages of critical commentary.

POETRY

Source text: An excerpt from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare

Full of vexation I come, with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia.
Stand forth, Demetrius. My noble lord,
This man hath my consent to marry her.
Stand forth, Lysander. And, my gracious Duke,
This man hath bewitched the bosom of my child.
Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes
And interchanged love-tokens with my child.
Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung
With feigning voice verses of feigning love,
And stolen the impression of her fantasy
With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds, conceits,
Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats—messengers
Of strong prevailment in unhardened youth.
With cunning hast thou filched my daughter's heart,
Turned her obedience, which is due to me,
To stubborn harshness. And, my gracious Duke,
Be it so she will not here, before your grace,
Consent to marry with Demetrius,
I beg the ancient privilege of Athens.
As she is mine, I may dispose of her,
Which shall be either to this gentleman
Or to her death, according to our law
Immediately provided in that case.

Embedding of a phrase

Suddenly into the scene, and breaking up the gentle love banter of Theseus and Hippolyta, comes Egeus "full of vexation," inveighing bitterly against his daughter, Hermia, and her would-be lover, Lysander.

Embedding of phrases with interpolation and omission

Most galling to Egeus is that Lysander, by "[filching Hermia's] heart," has "turned her obedience ... to stubborn harshness."

Embedding of a short passage including partial and full verse lines

Note that obliques are used to indicate line breaks.

Egeus says that, among his foul ploys, Lysander has "by moonlight at [Hermia's] window sung / With feigning voice verses of feigning love, / And stolen the impression of her fantasy" with tawdry and trivial enticements.

Off-setting of a long passage

Note that quotation marks are not used with the off-set quotation and that the quotation is single-spaced.

At the close of his railing, Egeus introduces the dreadful complication on which the play's principal conflict will begin to turn:

And, my gracious Duke,
Be it so she will not here, before your grace,

Consent to marry with Demetrius,
I beg the ancient privilege of Athens.
As she is mine, I may dispose of her,
Which shall be either to this gentleman
Or to her death, according to our law
Immediately provided in that case.

PROSE

Source text: An excerpt from "The Hollow of the Three Hills" by Nathaniel Hawthorne

In those strange old times, when fantastic dreams and madmen's reveries were realized among the actual circumstances of life, two persons met together at an appointed hour and place. One was a lady, graceful in form and fair of feature, though pale and troubled and smitten with an untimely blight in what should have been the fullest bloom of her years; the other was an ancient and meanly dressed woman of ill-favored aspects and so withered, shrunken, and decrepit that even the space since she began to decay must have exceeded the ordinary term of human existence. In the spot where they encountered, no mortal could observe them. Three little hills stood near each other, and down in the midst of them sunk a hollow basin, almost mathematically circular, two or three hundred feet in breadth, and of such a depth that a stately cedar might just be visible above the sides. Dwarf pines were numerous upon the hills and partly fringed the outer verge of the intermediate hollow, within which there was nothing but the brown grass of October and here and there a tree trunk that had fallen long ago and lay with no green successor from its roots.

Embedding of phrases with interpolations

Note that commas and the text's final period appear **inside** the quotation marks but that the semi-colon (the first one in the third line) appears **outside** the quotation mark.

Significant in the narrative's setting are vegetative details that ally the two unnamed characters with their immediate environment. The young woman is described as beset with "an untimely blight in what should have been the fullest bloom of her years"; the old woman is said to be "withered," "shrunken," in decay; and the location itself is a place where otherwise "stately [cedars]" are scarcely visible, pines are but "dwarf pines," the grass is brown, and fallen trees lie "with no green [successors at their] roots."

Off-setting of a long passage

Note that quotation marks are not used with the off-set quotation and that the quotation is single-spaced.

Among the effective elements of this exposition is the juxtaposing of the two characters, at once both decidedly different from and sadly similar to each other:

One was a lady, graceful in form and fair of feature, though pale and troubled and smitten with an untimely blight in what should have been the fullest bloom of her years; the other was an ancient and meanly dressed woman of ill-favored aspects and so withered, shrunken, and decrepit that even the space since she began to decay must have exceeded the ordinary term of human existence.

Embedded quotations must be *assimilated* into your text—which means that they must be smoothly and logically blended into your own text.

Here are three examples of **unassimilated quotations:**

The two brothers, even after eighteen years of separation, cannot be differentiated. "Say, stand apart. I know not which is which."

Luciana tries to show her reason. "O, know he is the bridle of your will." Understandably angry, "There's none but asses will be bridled so ... This servitude makes you to keep unwed."

The merchant protests Angelo's debt, which keeps him land-bound, "but that I am bound for Persia, and want guilders for my voyage."

Here now are revised versions of the above passages **with quotations assimilated:**

The two brothers, even after eighteen years of separation, cannot be differentiated. In frustration, the Duke **insists that the twins "stand apart," for he "[knows] not which is which."**

Luciana tries to show her reason, **saying to Adriana, "O, know he is the bridle of your will."** Understandably angry, **Adriana responds to Luciana's comment by saying, "there's none but asses will be bridled so," and says further that "this servitude makes [Luciana] to keep unwed."**

The merchant protests Angelo's debt, which keeps him land-bound, **declaring that he is "bound for Persia, and [wants] guilders for [his] voyage."**