

## Quoting Literature in a Critical Essay

Here are some guidelines. See the examples below and on page 2 for illustrations of all these.

- Limit quotations to the words or phrases you will actually discuss. Paraphrase the rest.
- Your discussion of a quotation should be *at least twice as long* as the quotation itself.
- Handle short quotes in-line unless the punctuation or format causes a problem.
- Block-indent long quotes one inch (generally 3 lines or more, but use your judgment). Block-quoting lets you to skip the extra quotation marks and preserve the source's line breaks, paragraphing, and punctuation, including end punctuation, making longer quotes easier to read.

### Shorter quotes: in-line

Prose or poetry – notice that we indicate poetry line breaks with a **space-slash-space**:

In Edward's speeches in this scene Marlowe's editor finds only four lines "imaginative, beautiful and memorable" (Steane 29), including these: "But what are kings, when regiment is gone, / But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?" (lines 26-27). That expression certainly deserves Steane's praise. It challenges the reader to imagine in what way a king, robbed of his command, can be like a shadow, what the sunshine represents, and why the king is no longer in the sunshine. This is fine poetic drama. It is not, however, characteristic of most of Marlowe's playwriting. Even his editor admits it can be very dull (Steane 29).

### Longer quotes: block-indent

Prose – notice we indicate necessary changes for clarity with **square brackets**:

Steane acknowledges another difference between the two writers, one very close to the heart of my thesis: [W]e do find recurrent in [Marlowe's] writing certain tones that are inescapably personal so that we are from time to time made aware of an author, in a sense that we are not when reading or watching Shakespeare. (11)

With that in mind, it is easy to suspect that his characters' "meanness, weakness or wickedness" (Steane 28) express Marlowe's own personality. Watching or reading Marlowe's other plays only reinforces the impression. This constant infusion of Marlowe's personal attitudes and responses throughout the action blurs the distinctions between characters and keeps them from "coming alive" in their own right. The author lacks the gift for understanding the motives and feelings of others, for setting himself aside.

(Keep end punctuation in its natural position in block-quote.)

Poetry:

Richard is not much of a king, but he is regal. He immediately asserts control of his audience, easily and ironically mocking the fickle loyalties of the courtiers:

God save the king! Will no man say amen?  
Am I both priest and clerk? well then, amen.  
God save the king! although I be not he;  
And yet, amen, if heaven do think him me.  
To do what service am I sent for hither?

(IV.1.175-79)

(separate line for the citation doesn't disrupt the poetic line)

He says this walking into the room, pretending to be in complete control, even though all the characters and even the audience know he was called there to hand over his crown. His tone is jolly. This strength from some inner imaginative resource is not invented just for this scene. It is in character with the verbally nimble, philosophical Richard we are used to.

Some poetry depends so strongly on line length for effect that quoting even a small part of it in-line distracts the reader, because all those line breaks have to be indicated by **slashes**:

Angelou's use of short lines in "Greyday" give the poem a tired, depressed effect when read aloud: "The day hangs heavy / loose and grey / when you're away" (lines 1-3). The first pause slows the reader down, making "loose and grey" seem like an afterthought to elaborate on



what she means by “heavy” in the previous line, as if these weary thoughts were just now forming in her mind. During the second pause the speaker seems to be recovering her train of thought to finish her sentence.

It is much easier to see what you mean with the example block-indented:

Angelou’s short lines in “Greyday” give the poem a tired, depressed effect:



The day hangs heavy  
loose and grey  
when you’re away.  
(lines 1-3)

(Keep end punctuation in its natural position in block-quote.)

The first pause slows the reader down, making “loose and grey” seem like an afterthought to elaborate on what she means by “heavy” in the previous line, as if these weary thoughts were just now forming in her mind. During the second pause the speaker seems to be recovering her train of thought to finish her sentence.

(No need to cite Angelou here – she’s cited in the first sentence)

Notice we get the period at the end of her sentence, where she intended it, without the interruption of the citation; and getting rid of the quotation marks, brings us closer to the tone the poet intended.

Like poetry, imaginative prose such as fiction often relies on punctuation, paragraph breaks, and the sense of “whitespace” – the way the prose looks on the page – for part of its effect. Trying to represent this three-paragraph conversation with in-line quotation creates typographical nonsense:



By omitting information like “said the older waiter,” Hemingway lets the reader decide which of the two men is speaking which lines in this conversation: “ ‘I wish he would go home. I never get to bed before three o’clock. What kind of hour is that to go to bed?’ ‘He stays up because he likes it.’ ‘He’s lonely. I’m not lonely. I have a wife waiting in bed for me.’ ” (pars. 34-36). This constant effort to match what is said with what we understand of the two men in conversation forces us to take an active part in the indirect characterization of the men.

Now see how much better it is when we simplify the punctuation and get the citation out of our way:

By omitting information like “said the older waiter,” Hemingway lets the reader decide which of the two men is speaking each line in this conversation:



“I wish he would go home. I never get to bed before three o’clock.  
What kind of hour is that to go to bed?”  
“He stays up because he likes it.”  
“He’s lonely. I’m not lonely. I have a wife waiting in bed for me.”  
(pars. 34-36)

This constant effort to match what is said with what we understand of the two men in conversation forces us to take an active part in the indirect characterization of the men.

1" block-indent      ½" tab each ¶

### A Footnote on quoting single words and very brief phrases

We put each very short quote in quotation marks, but sometimes it can cause a clutter of punctuation:

Lee creates a sense a sense of despairing poverty by piling up words of decay and neglect:

“dirty,” “remains,” “discarded,” “ancient,” “old,” “worn-out,” “scrawny,” and “slop” (157).

In such cases you may prefer one of these conventions to simplify the appearance and readability:

- ...and neglect: “dirty... remains... discarded... ancient... old... worn-out... scrawny... slop” (157).
- ...and neglect: *dirty, remains, discarded, ancient, old, worn-out, scrawny, and slop* (157).

### Works Cited

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