

# SOME MATTERS OF FORM

YALE UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

The opportunity to present your own thinking in essay form carries with it an essential responsibility to acknowledge as clearly and precisely as possible your use of the work of other writers. Proper documentation of the use of source material is a matter of the utmost ethical concern in the academic setting. Note that it is possible to cite a source and still commit plagiarism if you fail to indicate accurately the full extent and nature of your use of it.

An excellent guide to the documentation of college papers is *Sources: Their Use and Acknowledgment*, prepared and frequently updated by Dartmouth College and distributed at the time of matriculation to all freshmen at Yale. Read it and keep it for reference. For more detailed and exhaustive treatments of the same subject, this department recommends either the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or *The Chicago Manual of Style*; your instructor may specify a preference for one of these two. Full references to both manuals can be found in the last section of *Sources: Their Use and Acknowledgment*, under Humanities. In what follows, we call attention to a few matters that, once learned, will help you to be consistent in the method of documentation and other formalities.

Adequate documentation is not just an ethical responsibility and a defense against plagiarizing the work of others. Documentation is also a courtesy to your reader. Without it, the reader cannot follow up your insight or begin researching the subject where you left off. When teachers take the trouble of looking up your quotation in the original, it is not usually because they think you have misquoted but because they have not thought of the passage in the way you have and wish to reexamine it. Consistent form and documentation help your reader come to terms with your thinking and the evidence you present. Even when the references in your paper are all to one work, and that a required text for the course, get in the habit of documenting your source, in correct form. It is the right habit, and—who knows?—yours may be a prize-worthy essay that will find its way to readers unfamiliar with the required texts.

In all writing, keep your audience in mind. Academic writing, whether by students or professors or research scientists or others, is performed for people whose knowledge and purpose are close to the writer's own. An English course paper should therefore be designed for others—the instructor and

other members of the class at a minimum—who are also acquainted with the relevant texts and are seeking to learn more about them. Elaborate plot summaries are not likely to be of interest to such readers. When you need to refer to the action in a play or novel, use the narrative present tense. No one of us has all the answers about literary works; the aim is to contribute something to the understanding of the subject.

## USING QUOTATION

In critical papers about literature, the evidence to which you need to call attention can be presented directly, within your own prose, by means of quotation. Contrast the difficulty, for example, of illustrating on the page a point about sculpture or architecture or history. But to take advantage of quotation you need to be both precise and fair to the original. Restrict the quotation to the relevant words of the original, but not if these are contradicted by the surrounding words. In general, when you quote longer passages of the text in question (your reader, remember, can be assumed to have some familiarity with it), go on to analyze the features that support your argument.

Verse or prose quotations of more than four lines should be set off from your own words, indented and double-spaced, and without quotation marks unless these are part of the quotation. If the quotation begins in the middle of a line of verse, or with a new paragraph in prose, this should be reproduced as such and not shifted to the left margin. In most cases, a parenthetical reference to line numbers, to page number, or to act, scene, and line numbers should follow. For example:

**For much of the poem, Wordsworth seems to be musing aloud to himself, but then he suddenly addresses a companion, his sister Dorothy, and attributes to her some of the restorative powers he had been attributing to nature:**

**Nor, perchance,  
If I were not thus taught, should I the more  
Suffer my genial spirits to decay:  
For thou art with me, here, upon the banks  
Of this fair river; thou, my dearest  
Friend, My Dear, Dear Friend, and in thy voice I catch  
The language of my former heart, and read  
My former pleasures in the shooting lights  
Of thy wild eyes.**

(112-20)

Verse or prose quotations of less than four lines can be incorporated into your own sentences. Use double quotation marks to separate the quoted words from your own, and separate each line of verse with a forward slash with spaces on either side ( / ). Do not use a slash to indicate line breaks in a prose quotation. Use single quotation marks for quotations within the quotation. For example:

**As Redcross rashly approaches Error's den, his armor puts forth a dim reflection "much like a shade" (1.1.14). Una cries out to Redcross: "Add faith unto your force, and be not faint: / Strangle her, else she sure will strangle thee" (1.1.18).**

Precisely because quotation is such an important tool for papers on literature, it should be employed carefully and unambiguously. The rule is that everything that appears between a pair of double quotation marks (or within a longer, indented extract, which eliminates the need for quotation marks) should read exactly as it does in the original. The two exceptions to this rule actually help to enforce it. First, by using square brackets (not curved parentheses) you can introduce into a quotation any contextual or explanatory information, such as a proper name where only a pronoun appears in the original. Second, words may be omitted if you indicate their omission by means of an ellipsis. omission, from the middle of quoted material is signaled by exactly three spaced periods:

**As Blackmur notes, "Mr. Eliot's poetry is not devotional in any sense of which we have been speaking, but . . . it is the more religious for that."**

No ellipsis at the beginning of a quotation is necessary since everyone understands that the quotation is only a fragment from the entire work, which continues before and after. An ellipsis at the end of a quotation is used by some writers to indicate that the sentence in the original does not end at this point, or even that there is more of the same kind of matter in the original. Add a fourth period to an ellipsis at the end of a quotation only when the first of them serves as the period at the conclusion of your sentence. For example:

**As Blackmur notes, "Mr. Eliot's poetry is not devotional in any sense of which we have been speaking . . . ."**

If you wish to omit as much as a whole paragraph from a long extract, or a good many lines from a column of verse, type the three spaced periods on a separate line between the two parts of the long quotation. The best way to tell the reader how many verses you have omitted is to give the exact line numbers of the verses you have quoted and are about to discuss:

**Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;**

**I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.**

...

**I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,**

**But here I am to speak what I do know.**

**(3.2.79-80, 106-07)**

## PARENTHETICAL REFERENCES

Accurately locate all quotations for your reader, either by means of a footnote or by using a brief parenthetical reference. A parenthetical reference is best if you are quoting frequently from a single work. Use line numbers to identify quotations from poetry, page numbers to identify quotations from prose. If you need to indicate larger divisions of the work, such as book, canto, and stanza numbers of a poem or act, scene, and line numbers of a play, use Arabic numerals for each, separated by periods. In all of these cases, if you are following the form specified in the Chicago Manual of Style, be sure to include a footnote or endnote, keyed to the first citation, in which you provide full bibliographical information for the edition of the work from which you are quoting. In this same note, explain which divisions of the original (line or page number, etc.) you are indicating by your enumeration. If you are instead using the parenthetical reference form specified in the MLA Handbook, you will not need to footnote the full bibliographical information, which will be included in your concluding List of Works Cited.

Questions sometimes arise as to how to combine with your quotations and parenthetical references the necessary punctuation of your own sentences. By American convention, periods and commas required by the grammar of your sentence precede the close-quotation marks, even when they are not found in the original. Colons and semicolons you wish to use fall outside the close-quotation marks. Question and exclamation marks go within the quotation marks if they are part of the original, but after the quotation marks and parenthetical reference if used to conclude your own sentence.

In the former case—question or exclamation marks that are part of the quotation—add a period after the parenthetical reference to separate it from your next sentence. These small matters have a logic of their own. You may feel better about them if you recall the difference it makes on which side of the parenthesis a variable is placed in an algebraic notation. Examples:

- “your quotation,” then the next clause**
- “your quotation.” Then the next sentence**
- But:
  - “your quotation”; then the next clause**
  - “your quotation”: then the next clause**
  - “your quotation exclaims!”.**
  - “your quotation asks?”.**
  - You exclaim about “your quotation”!**
  - You ask about “your quotation”?**

The use of punctuation changes slightly when you include a parenthetical reference along with your quotation. In this case, all punctuation, including periods and commas, come after the parenthetical reference: the parenthetical reference is always to the quotation that precedes it, so you don’t want the parentheses to float ambiguously between sentences or clauses. Examples:

- “your quotation” (5), then the next clause**
- “your quotation” (5). Then the next sentence**
- “your quotation” (5); then the next independent clause**
- “your quotation” (5): then the next independent clause**
- “your quotation” (5)! Then the next sentence**
- “your quotation” (5)? Then the next sentence**
- “your quotation exclaims!” (5). Then the next sentence**
- “your quotation asks?” (5). Then the next sentence**

## FOOTNOTES AND ENDNOTES

Besides using a parenthetical reference, the other way to locate quoted material and to simultaneously indicate its source is to use a footnote or endnote. If you are following *The Chicago Manual of Style*, a footnote or endnote to a book should include, in the following order, the author’s name, first name first; the title of the book, italicized or underlined; the name of the editor or translator (if any),

first name first, preceded by “ed.” or “trans.”; the volume number in Arabic numerals, if you are citing a multi-volume work (“vol. 2”); in parentheses, the place of publication followed by a colon, the name of the publishing company, followed by a comma, and the year of publication. A note to an article should include the author’s name; the title in quotation marks; the name of the periodical italicized or underlined; the volume number in Arabic numerals, followed by the year of publication in parentheses and the relevant page numbers. Note that both in the body of your paper and in footnotes, titles of books and periodicals, plays and long poems, are underlined or italicized; titles of chapters in books, of articles in collections or periodicals, of short stories, essays, and poems are enclosed within quotation marks. Here are a few examples in the style specified by the *Chicago Manual of Style*:

**1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982). All quotations are from this edition and cited by act, scene, and line numbers.**

**2. John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 12.**

**3. Maynard Mack, “The World of *Hamlet*,” *Yale Review* 41 (1952), 520.**

**4. Elaine Showalter, “Representing Ophelia,” in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Parker, Patricia and Geoffrey Hartman (1985; rpt. New York: Routledge, 1991), 77-94.**

**5. To Louise Colet, 3 Oct. 1846, in *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, 1830-1857*, ed. and trans. Francis Steegmuller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 83.**

If you are instead using *The MLA Handbook*, which requires a brief parenthetical reference to the author or work within your own text, you will not need a footnote, but the same bibliographical information would appear in your List of Works Cited in the following form:

**Flaubert, Gustave. *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, 1830-1857*. Ed. and trans. Francis Steegmuller. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980.**

**Kerrigan, John. *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.**

**Mack, Maynard. “The World of *Hamlet*.” *Yale Review* 41 (1952): 502-23.**

**Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. Harold Jenkins. London: Methuen, 1982.**

**Showalter, Elaine. "Representing Ophelia." *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. Eds. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman. 1985. New York: Routledge, 1991. 77-94.**

Needless to say, many more examples of how best to refer to various kinds of texts can be found in *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *The MLA Handbook*. Good documentation, whatever the precise form, characterizes the source (book, article, collection, etc.) and uses an accepted, consistent method to locate the citation from it as accurately as possible. Adopting a consistent practice of annotation informs your readers and enables you to consult the source again as needed.

## LAST STEPS

Your papers should be printed out, double-spaced, on 8 1/2" by 11" standard paper with a margin of at least 1" on all sides. Use a font size that allows about 300 words a page, and always number the pages to make it easier for your reader to refer to them. A short paper does not need a title page. Instead, as a heading, place your name, the course number, the instructor's or section leader's name, and the date in the upper right corner. Then center the title of the paper a few lines below the last line of your heading and two lines above the beginning of your text.

That title can be useful both to you and the reader. As you plan a paper, try proposing different titles to yourself and set down the one that best represents the direction you wish to take before you start to write. The title, which does not require quotation marks or italics, can always be changed once you have completed and revised your draft and have a better idea of what the paper is about. Before you undertake final revisions, it is a good idea to print out a draft of your paper. This printout, on paper and not the computer screen, is in most cases the version of your paper that meets the eye of your reader. Look at it carefully, therefore, with the eyes and thoughts of a reader, preferably after an interval has passed since the drafting of the paper. Enter revisions on the computer and carefully proofread the final draft.

When the paper is returned, take note of the instructor's comments large and small. Every instructor, every reader, sees and thinks a little differently. Ask about any comments that you do not understand and take to heart any suggestions for improvement. Even the best writing will improve with practice.