

Citing Poetry

Style and Formatting Guide for Citing a Work of Poetry

The following information is an adapted version of the style and formatting guidelines found in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (2009), published by the Modern Language Association. This sheet is to serve as a ready-reference; more in-depth descriptions can be found in the handbook.

Titles

- Enclose a short poem's title in double quotations; do not underline it or place it in italics (3.6.3).
⇒ "Whoso List to Hunt"
- Italicize the titles of book-length poems; do not enclose book-length poems in double quotation marks (3.6.2).
⇒ *The Iliad*

Quoting Poetry

When Quoting Three or Fewer Lines of Poetry (3.7.3):

- Use double quotation marks around your quotation. Capitalize whatever is capitalized in the original poem.
- Include the author's name, the title(s) of the poem(s), and the line number(s) in the text (for better source integration) or within a parenthetical citation.
- If the passage you are quoting ends with a period, you may omit it because the period ending your sentence will serve in its place. However, if the passage you are quoting ends with a question mark, an exclamation point, or a dash, leave that punctuation mark, and then later use a period to end your sentence. If the passage you are quoting ends with a colon, semicolon, or comma, delete that punctuation mark, add an ellipsis, and later use a period to end your sentence.
- Keep the quotation WITHIN YOUR text. Indicate the end of one line and the beginning of the next line with a forward slash spaced separately from the text:

In "Into My Own," Frost expresses a desire to roam, stating: "I should not be withheld but that some day / into their vastness I should steal away, / Fearless of ever finding open land" (5-7).

OR

William Shakespeare declares that his "mistress ... treads on the ground" (12).

- The ellipsis (...) used in the example above indicates the omission of a word or words from the original quotation. This may be used for better integration of a quotation into a text. Note, however, that no ellipsis is necessary preceding the first word of the quote, although words have been omitted. Similarly, ellipses are unnecessary at the end of a quote when words have been omitted.

When Quoting Four or More Lines of Poetry:

- Include the author's name, the title(s) of the poem(s), and the line number(s) in the text (for better source integration) or within a parenthetical citation.
- **In quoting four or more lines**, begin the quotation on a new line indented one inch from the left margin, and reproduce each line of the poem as it appears in your source, double spacing each line and indenting it one inch. Beginning and ending quotation marks as well as slashes to indicate line breaks are not needed. Place the parenthetical citation after the final line of the quotation and after final punctuation.
- Note: Unlike sentences containing shorter quotations, which typically end with a period, block quotations end with the citation:

In "Revelation," Robert Frost illustrates the way in which we see the world:

We make ourselves a place apart
Behind light words that tease and flout,
But oh, the agitated hear
Till someone really find us out. (1-4)

When Quoting From a Book-length Poem:

- If a poem is long enough to be divided into books or cantos, type the title of the poem (italicized), the book or canto number, a period followed by no space, and the line or line numbers. The citation that follows refers to book 7, lines 24—28 of Homer's *Odyssey*.

I will go before you and show the way, but say
not a word as you go, and do not look at any man,
nor ask him questions; for the people here cannot
abide strangers, and do not like men who come from
some other place. (*Odyssey* 7.24-28)

Works Cited

A POEM (5.5.6):

Poet's Name. "Title of Work." *Title of Anthology*. Editors/Translators. City: Publisher, Year. Page Numbers. Print.

Frost, James. "Strawberries in a Field." *Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*. Ed. Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson. New York: Heinle, 2002. 142-144. Print.

A POEM FOUND ONLINE (5.6.2):

Poet's Name. "Title of Work." *Title of site*. Name of institution associated with site, date of publication (if available, if not use n.d.). Web. Date of access.

Frost, James. "Strawberries in a Field." *Literature Resource Center*. Alabama Virtual Library, n.d. Web. 5 Mar. 2004.

A BOOK-LENGTH POEM WITH A TRANSLATOR (5.5.11):

Poet's Name. *Title of Work*. Editors/Translators. City: Publishing House, Year. Print.

Alighieri, Dante. *Inferno*. Trans. John Ciardi. New York: NAL, 1971. Print.

Note: For each entry, the publication medium must be specified as either "Print" or "Web."

Last modified 11/18/10