

The Ten Commandments of Literary Quotation

1. Never allow a quote to stand alone in a sentence.

Incorrect:

Frost creates a sense of urgency. “The woods are lovely, dark, and deep, / But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep.”

Instead, connect them to your writing using one of the following methods:

• *Turn the period into a full colon*

Frost creates a sense of urgency: “The woods are lovely, dark and deep, / But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep.”

• *Integrate the quote into the sentence*

Frost creates a sense of urgency in his traveling amid “woods [that] are lovely, dark, and deep,” adding a sense of devotion and commitment by reminding himself that “I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep.”

• *Use an introductory phrase*

Frost states, “The woods are lovely, dark, and deep, / But I have promised to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep.”

2. Avoid beginning or ending a sentence or paragraph with a quotation.

If a quotation is used, it must be first prefaced and then explained. With this in mind, rarely is it acceptable to end a paragraph with a quotation.

3. Do not follow a quotation with a quotation.

Incorrect:

Ellison’s narrator, despite the absurdity of the situation, is most concerned with giving his speech:

“And yet, I had begun to worry about my speech again.” “My eye pained and swelled with each throb of my pounding heart and I wondered if now I would be allowed to speak.”

For each quote you use, there must be an explanatory phrase:

Ellison’s narrator, despite the absurdity of the situation, is most concerned with giving his speech: “And yet, I had begun to worry about my speech again.” Even after a profound beating, it is all he can think of: “My eye pained and swelled with each throb of my pounding heart and I wondered if now I would be allowed to speak.”

4. Use ellipsis to indicate words removed from a quotation. Three periods are used to leave out less than a complete sentence.

“My eye pained and swelled... and I wondered if now I would be allowed to speak.”

If a sentence or more is left out, four periods are used:

“And yet I had begun to worry.... Would they recognize my ability?”

NOTE: Ellipses are only necessary in indicating words missing from the middle of a quotation, not the beginning or the end.

5. Use square brackets to make changes within a quotation, whether part of a word, a few words, or even punctuation.

For example, the name in brackets replaces the pronoun “her” contained in the original short story text:

Chopin portrays Mrs. Mallard as overjoyed at her newfound freedom: “[Mrs. Mallard’s] fancy was running riot along those days ahead.”

6. Use single quotation marks when quoting material that initially featured quotation marks in the text. If your source/text reads:

Mme. Forestier had stopped. “You say that you bought a necklace of diamonds to replace mine?”

Because you are adding a set double quotations, you will change the sentence so that it reads:

“Mme. Forestier had stopped. ‘You say that you bought a necklace of diamonds to replace mine?’”

NOTE: Indented quotations are an exception. See Commandment 9 below.

7. Give his/her full name when mentioning an author’s or critic’s name for the first time. After this initial use, only use the last name. Do not use honorifics, such as Ms., Mr., Dr., Prof., etc. Rule applies for both genders.

Critic Barbara Christian was a leading scholar of black women’s literature. Christian has critiqued the work of such major literary figures as Audre Lorde, Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.

8. Indicate line breaks in poetry by typing a slash (/).(Refer to example in Commandment 1 above)

9. Indent quotations that are longer than four typed lines. Indent one inch from the left margin and double-space like the rest of your paper. When quotations are indented, quotation marks are not needed. For example:

Alice Walker states in her essay, “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens”:

And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read. And so it is, certainly, with my own mother. Unlike “Ma” Rainey’s songs, which retained their creator’s name even while blasting forth from Bessie Smith’s mouth, no song or poem will bear my mother’s name.

This interest in the creative lines of anonymous, forgotten foremothers can be seen in Walker’s short story, “Everyday Use.”

10. Place period and commas within quotation marks; semicolons and colons always go outside. When using parenthetical citation with quotations, close quotation marks, place parentheses, then add punctuation:

Jackson makes the lottery seem like a normal event, akin to “square dances, the teenage club, the Halloween program” (Jackson 243).

Original end punctuation may be omitted so that punctuation necessary for proper formatting of the quotation may be added. Question marks and exclamation points should be placed according to intended emphasis or meaning. If the question or exclamation mark is part of the quotation, they should be placed inside the quotation marks:

Carver’s narrator isn’t sure how to speak of the cathedrals: “How could I even begin to describe it?” (315)

If you as the writer are asking a question (or making an exclamation), they should go outside the quotation marks:

Why does the blind man ask Carver’s narrator to “Close [his eyes]” (317)?

(adapted from handout by Prof. Armida Gilbert, www.gpc.edu)