

QUOTING PROPERLY IN LITERATURE PAPERS

Show and Tell

- Through its thesis and topic sentences, a literature paper **tells** your reader what conclusions you have drawn about a literary text. However, along with your interpretation of the text, you must submit evidence that **shows** your reader how you arrived at these conclusions. Your anchor your observations in the text through quotes, paraphrases, and summaries, all of which are called textual references. Note that quotes (especially long quotes) never make a point for you; they can only support a point you have already stated in your own words.

Quotes, Paraphrases, Summaries

- When you **quote**, you copy text passages as they appear in the work, word for word; quotes are marked with quotation marks. The page reference follows the quotation in parentheses; end punctuation goes at the end:

When Oberon explains to Puck the origin of the love potion, he refers to Queen Elizabeth, whom he calls “a fair vestal throned by the west” (203).

Rejected by Demetrius, Helena makes a desperate plea for his attention: “I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius, / The more you beat me, I will fawn on you” (203).

Drama scholars often cite by act and scene (for the above examples, this would be II/1), but in most literature papers, you will just go by page numbers. Note that you signal the end of a verse line (as in Sophocles or Shakespeare) with a **slash**, followed by a capital initial for the new line, just as it appears in the text. You do not have to do this when characters speak prose.

- **Quotes have to follow the text exactly.** However, a partial quote must fit the grammar of the sentence into which it is integrated, so you might have to change a pronoun, a verb tense, or an initial capital letter to make it fit. Put square brackets [] around words in a quote you had to change to make them fit your sentence. Better yet, try to paraphrase the parts that would give you trouble and retain only a few key words in quotations.

Rejected by Demetrius, Helena loses all self-respect and begs him to treat her as his “spaniel,” to “spurn [her], strike [her], / Neglect [her], lose [her]” (203) rather than to leave her altogether.

- **Shorten longer quotes** as much as possible; cut out everything you don’t absolutely need to prove your point. Put ellipses (. . .) where you took out words from the original text. If several quotes in one sentence come from the same page, one page reference at the end is enough.

The chaplain in Brecht’s Mother Courage insists that war and peace are not that different, that “there’s peace in war,” as he puts it, allowing people to “do a crap... have a bit of shuteye” or procreate “behind a bar or something” (597).

- When you **paraphrase**, you render ideas from a text in your own words; you do not use quotation marks. Because there are no marks signaling the beginning and end of a paraphrase, it is extremely important that you mark the beginning of each paraphrase by giving its context; you mark the end with the page number in parentheses like you would for a quote.

When Oberon explains to Puck the origin of the love potion, he tells him that Cupid’s arrow was originally intended for Queen Elizabeth, but she escaped and the arrow pierced a flower instead (203).

- Experienced writers **mix paraphrase and short quotations** because this is the best method to include precise textual references without the awkwardness of long quotes; the page number, in this case, goes at the end of the paraphrase:

Rejected by Demetrius, Helena makes a desperate plea for his attention, begging him to treat her like his “spaniel” and to mistreat her all he wants as long as he does not ignore her completely (203).

When Teiresias reluctantly comes before Oedipus, the king greets him with reverence, calling him a “holy prophet / In whom, alone of all men, truth was born” (46). The priest quickly becomes “a wicked old man” (47) when he refuses to speak, and when he finally does reveal the truth, Oedipus heaps insult upon insult on him, calling him a “sightless, witless, senseless, mad old man,” “a decrepit fortune-teller,” and a “prophet fraud” (47).

- **Summaries** are short synopses of longer scenes and passages. Unless they contain short quotes, they do not require page numbers. However, it must be clear which play you are referring to, so make sure your introduction to the summary contains a proper reference.

Beware of the Haunted Paper!

- Never assume your reader knows the text as well as you: always **provide the context in which a quote appears** and explain how the quote ties in with your point. Quotes floating in a paper without proper context and

connections with your points are called “ghost quotes”; they do absolutely nothing for your paper except earn you a bad grade. In the example below, the writer did not establish a clear connection between the point and the quote; these are **ghost quotes**:

The characters in The Importance of Being Earnest do not take love and marriage seriously. “It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal.” “Divorces are made in heaven” (438).

- The best way to **avoid ghost quotes** is to paraphrase most of the textual references and only quote the most important (or most striking) bits; to avoid confusion in longer paraphrases, document the quotes/paraphrases for each sentence:

The characters in Wilde’s play do not take love and marriage seriously. When Algernon explains his views on love and romance to Jack, he acknowledges the romance of being in love, but claims that “there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal” because it would lead to marriage (438). Deprived of uncertainty, the “very essence of romance,” married people endure the drudgery of matrimony until they can find a way out: “Divorces are made in heaven,” Algernon tells the love-stricken Jack (438).

- If you must **quote a complete sentence** to back up one of your points, you cannot expect the quote to speak for itself. For every sentence-length quote, you must provide a statement that makes the point the quote proves. Put a colon between your point and the quote that backs it up:

Ever mischievous, Puck delights in the trouble he has caused the young lovers and looks forward to witnessing the climax of all the confusion: “Shall we their fond pageant see? / Lord, what fools these mortals be!” (211)

Note that when a quote ends in a question mark or exclamation point, the punctuation mark (because it is part of the quote) appears inside the quotation marks, before the page reference.

- Professionals often split longer quotes and insert the name of the speaker in between; this is called the “inquit phrase” (“inquit” means “he/she said”) If you split two complete sentences, put a period after the inquit phrase. If you insert the name of the speaker into the middle of a sentence, put a comma after the inquit phrase.

“Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth,” Jack tells Gwendolen after he has discovered that he is really called Ernest. “Can you forgive me?” (461)

“On the contrary, Aunt Augusta,” Jack replies to his aunt’s accusation that he is behaving insincerely, “I’ve now realized for the first time the vital Importance of Being Earnest” (461)

Unlike her Victorian contemporaries, Lady Bracknell does not believe in education: “I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance,” she tells Jack as she interviews him as a potential candidate for her daughter’s hand. “Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone” (442).

- **Never, ever** introduce a long quote by a phrase like “Sophocles tells us:” or “Lady Bracknell says:” This is mindless, clumsy, lazy; it proves that you have not paid attention to this handout, and it will result in your grade taking a nose dive.

Works Cited

- At the end of a literature paper, cite the text (or texts) you have used in your analysis. Since most of you will be citing from a textbook anthology, you will give the name of the author and the name of the literary text first and then cite the textbook in which it appears. The titles of plays and novels are underlined; titles of poems and short stories go in quotation marks. The page numbers at the end refer to the page numbers on which the text appears:

Wilde, Oscar. The Importance of Being Earnest. The Compact Bedford Introduction to Drama. 4th ed. Ed. Lee A. Jacobus. Boston: Bedford / St.Martin’s, 2001. 437-461.

All of the quotes used in the above examples appear in The Compact Bedford Introduction to Drama, 4th ed. Ed. Lee A. Jacobus. Boston: Bedford / St.Martin’s, 2001.