

Punctuating Quotations

Brackets

- ◆ Brackets are used when a writer wants to add something to a quotation in order to clarify it. If you wish to add something to a quotation, place the additional information within square brackets like these: [].

Writer J.F. Powers believes, “They [priests] are officially committed to both [earthly and heavenly] in the way most people are not” (Hagopian 67).

The Texaco station [just outside Chicago] is one of the busiest in the nation,” said a company spokesperson.

- ◆ Occasionally, you will need to make a minor revision to a portion of the quotation to make it match your own writing in terms of tense, number, voice, or capitalization.

The author argues that “[p]sychotherapists often overlook the benefits of self-deception.” (Note that normally, “psychotherapists” would be capitalized because it is a complete sentence. However, because it is embedded into this quotation, it is not capitalized.)

In talking with Mayor Fulcher, she claims that “[she] cannot believe the rate of inflation. (Note that in the original quote, Mayor Johnson claimed, “I cannot believe the rate of inflation.” However, in order to make the quote fit into the sentence the pronoun “I” had to be changed to “she”.)

- ◆ Keep in mind that it is unethical to edit a quotation in a way that changes the meaning of the original. It is also unethical to add or change a quote if you do not note the change with brackets. When in doubt, keep the original quotation, and alter your own sentence to make it fit the quotation.

Commas and Periods

- ◆ Unless you are using MLA or APA style documentation, the comma and period always go inside the end quotation mark.

Many people, like Robert Frost, think about “the road not taken,” but not many have taken “the one less traveled by.”

- ◆ If you are using in-text parenthetical documentation according to APA or MLA guidelines, the period or comma should go outside the end parentheses.

In the Aeneid, Virgil describes the ships as cleaving the “green woods reflected in the calm water” (Smith 124).

- ◆ Commas and periods always go inside a quotation within another quotation.

“I read recently,” he said, “that Patrick Henry never said, ‘Give me liberty or give me death.’”

Colons and Semicolons

- ◆ The colon and semicolon always go outside of the end quotation mark.

Students who do not pass the high school exit exam receive “certificates of completion”; those who pass are awarded diplomas.

He called his daily routine his “Mr. Mom duties”: laundry, changing the baby, cooking supper, and washing the dishes.

Ellipses

- ◆ An ellipsis is three spaced periods (. . .) that indicate that words have been omitted from a quotation. Ellipses are useful if you want to include only the most pertinent material from the quotation. However, you must keep in mind that your omission should not alter the meaning of the original quotation.

- ◆ For omissions in the middle of a quotation, use three spaced dots.

“When I was a young man, . . . I was perpetually starting new propositions.”

- ◆ For omissions at the end of a sentence, use three spaced dots followed by a period.

According to humorist Dave Barry, “from outer space Europe appears to be shaped like a large ketchup stain. . . .”

- ◆ If a parenthetical citation follows an omission at the end of a sentence, put the period after the closing parentheses.

According to John Hospers, “Criminal actions in general are not actions for which their agents are responsible; the agents are passive not active. . . .” (54).

- ◆ If you want to omit one entire sentence or more, use four spaced dots with a complete sentence before and after them.

“Immanuel Valikovsky states that “Manuscript Troana and other documents of the Mayas describe a cosmic catastrophe The face of the earth changed, mountains collapsed” (138).

- ◆ Do not begin a quotation with an ellipsis. Ellipses are needed only if you omit words in the middle or at the end of a quotation.

Exclamation Points and Question Marks

- ◆ When the entire sentence is a question or exclamation, but the quoted passage is not, then the question mark or exclamation point goes outside the end quotation mark.

Which Shakespearean character said, “Fortune is painted blind, with a muffler afore her eyes”?

I can’t believe he said that Celine Dion has a “horrible voice and tone-deaf ears”!

- ◆ If the quoted passage is a question or exclamation, but the sentence itself is not, then the mark goes inside the end quotation mark.

The student asked, “When did Olive Ann Burns write Cold Sassy Tree?”

The child shouted, “I want more Fruit Loops!”

- ◆ When both the entire sentence and the passage in quotation marks are questions or exclamations, the mark goes inside the end quotation mark.

In the prologue to his novel Invisible Man, doesn’t Ralph Ellison ask, “But what did I do to be so blue?”

Then the crowd shouted, “Run home!”

Single Quotation Marks

- ◆ Single quotation marks are used when you want to acknowledge a quote within a larger quotation.

George Gilder believes that “monogamy is central to any democratic social contract, designed to prevent a breakdown of society into a ‘war of every person against every other person.’”

Slash Marks

- ◆ The slash mark (/) is used when you want to indicate the separation of lines of poetry.

James Merrill retreats into a childlike world in the poem “The Furnished Room”: “Time howled outside/ But central heat/ Hissed back and kept us warm.”