



How to Quote Poetry

USING POETRY IN A PAPER

If you are writing a paper about a poem, you need to know the rules that apply to direct quotations, citations, and documentation. MLA format is very specific about how you handle material from a poem, and you should try to implement these requirements in your essay or research paper. Please use the following guidelines, which are based on the 8th edition of the *MLA Handbook* (2016)

QUOTATIONS

Brief Quotation of a Line: If you are quoting a portion of a line from a poem, simply insert it into your sentence as you would a normal quotation.

For example: Sylvia Plath, whose authoritarian father died when she was only eight years old, often includes references to him in her poetry. He appears in “The Beekeeper’s Daughter” as “hieratical in [his] frock coat, maestro of the bees” (6).

Brief Quotation of Multiple Lines: If you are quoting more than one line from a poem, you must indicate line breaks by using a forward slash mark (/).

For example: Dylan Thomas’ poetry creates vivid imagery for the reader, but it just as often produces tantalizing sounds. At times, these sounds are used by Thomas to drive the poem forward, creating a tempo that carries the reader quickly from one line to the next. In “After the Funeral,” Thomas ends one line with a rapid repetition of the “t” sound, an alliteration that pushes the reader to the next line which begins with the same sound: “muffle-toed tap / tap happily” (2-3).

Longer Quotation: If you are quoting more than a couple of lines from a poem, you may choose to set it off by indenting the lines and treating it as a “block” quotation, making sure to maintain double-spacing. Copy the poem’s structure as it appears in the source (e.g. if a line does not begin at the left margin).

For example: Dylan Thomas’ “Fern Hill” is a great example of a poem that includes autobiographical elements. The farm in this poem is a clear reference to the one owned by Thomas’ aunt, and, in all likelihood, the speaker is the poet himself, the “prince of the apple towns” of the first stanza (6). The speaker is looking back on his childhood, and the poem evokes the innocence and carefree attitudes of his youth. Take, for instance, the beginning of the third stanza:

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it
was air
And playing, lovely and watery

And fire green as grass. (20-24)

Note: The title of a regular poem is set off with quotation marks, whereas the title of an epic poem (which is book-length) is italicized. For example, the Dylan Thomas poem, “Vision and Prayer,” is a short work, but the epic poem, *Beowulf*, is a long, book-length work.

CITATIONS

Include the title and the line number(s): (“Fern Hill” 26)

Use the word *line* or *lines* in the first citation referring to the poem. Subsequent citations referring to the same poem do not need to include the word *line* or *lines*.

For example: (“The Thin People” lines 3-4) then (“The Thin People” 7-9)

If the poem’s lines are unnumbered, include the page number.

When quoting from a long poetic work (such as an epic poem) that includes division numbers (e.g. cantos), use the division number and line numbers: (*Odyssey* 2.37)

DOCUMENTATION

SHORT POEM

Include the author’s last name, first name, title of poem, title of book, other contributors, publisher, publication date, and total span of page numbers:

Thomas, Dylan. “Fern Hill.” *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas: 1934-1952*, New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1971, pp. 178-180.

If you are accessing the poem as part of an e-book, include the author’s last name, first name, title of poem, title of book, other contributors, name of device, publisher, and publication date:

Thomas, Dylan. “Fern Hill.” *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas: 1934-1952*. Kindle ed., New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2007.

If you are accessing the poem from a website, include the author’s last name, first name, title of poem, title of website, other contributors, publisher, publication date, and the URL:

Thomas, Dylan. “Fern Hill.” *Poets*, Academy of American Poets, 2017, poets.org/poetsorg/poem/fern-hill.

EPIC POEM

Include the author’s last name, first name, title of book, other contributors, publisher, and publication date:

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Translated by Robert Fitzgerald, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998.

If you are accessing the epic poem as an e-book, include the author’s last name, first name, title of book, other contributors, name of device, publisher, and publication date:

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Translated by Robert Fitzgerald, Kindle ed., Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007.