

## COMMON PROBLEMS WITH CITATION

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Always introduce quotations before they appear in your paper. No quotation should stand by itself as a separate sentence. Instead, your introductory phrasing should tie the quotation into the flow of your argument, and you should follow each quotation by explaining why it is important or what point it illustrates.

- **Bad Example #1:** There are many examples of self-analysis in Plato's philosophy. "The unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato 45).
- **Bad Example #2:** Plato thinks people should analyze their own lives. "The unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato 45).
- **Acceptable Example:** Plato thinks people should analyze their own lives: "The unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato 45). [In this example, the author uses a colon to show that a quote follows the first sentence]
- **Better Example:** Plato thinks people should analyze their own lives. As he writes in one dialogue, "The unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato 45). His attitude is a common one among Greek philosophers.

Note that in the good examples, the writer doesn't suddenly start off a quotation at the beginning of the sentence, and the writer doesn't leave it hanging, unattached from the surrounding sentences. Instead, the writer attaches it to the previous introductory material with appropriate punctuation, or she adds a short introductory phrase to set the reader up for the quote. She also follows the quote with an explanation of why that quote is important.

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### Q: Does the Punctuation Mark Appear Before or After the Quotation Mark?

**A: It varies.**

It goes before the quotation mark when there is no parenthetical citation of a direct quote.

When using quotation marks without using parenthetical documentation, the normal rule for MLA guidelines is to place the comma inside the final punctuation mark. So, unless you are quoting material and using a parenthetical citation, commas always go inside the quotation marks, rather than just after them; for instance:

- Hemingway is an authorial "stud," one who wrote manly books.

This rule also applies to the title of short works (songs, short poems, and short stories). The punctuation goes inside the quotation mark, as you will note in the example below.

- Ulysses is similar to Hemingway's hero in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," and the character called Francis Macomber in "The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber."

You should never, never end up with two periods at the end of a sentence.

**No! Wrong!** In Book Thirteen of The Odyssey, Homer writes, ". . . You must come from the other end of nowhere, / else you are a great booby, having to ask / what place this is." (301-303).

You should only have one period or punctuation mark.

**Yes! Perfect!** In Book Thirteen of The Odyssey, Homer writes, ". . . You must come from the other end of nowhere, / else you are a great booby, having to ask / what place this is" (301-303).

**BUT! The Punctuation Goes After the Citation with Short Parenthetical Citations:**

However, with parenthetical citation, punctuation comes *after* the parenthetical citation, rather than being enclosed by the quotation marks. Notice where the period goes in the following examples:

- As Waley observes, "Blah blah blah blah" (42).
- or
- One author has observed that "Blah blah blah blah blah" (Waley 42).

Note there is no comma after the author's name in MLA format.

**Slashes for Poetry and Verse**

With poetry or plays written in verse, the student uses a slash to show where each line ends in the poem. If there are three or less lines, the material appears within the body of the paragraph like any other short quote:

- In Book Thirteen of The Odyssey, Homer writes, ". . . You must come from the other end of nowhere, / else you are a great booby, having to ask / what place this is" (301-303).

Note that in the example above, the numbers refer to lines, not page numbers. We quote articles and essays by page number, but poetry and plays, we quote by act, scene, and line numbers.

Richard's changes in personality become manifest in his imagery of weather. In the beginning of the play, we see this tendency in his first words: "Now is the winter of our discontent / made glorious summer by this son of York" (R3 1.1.1-2). The transformation of cold winter into warm summer mirrors his change from boredom to excitement.

**Capitalization of Chapters, Books, Acts and Scenes**

One of the oddities of English capitalization: when you refer to a chapter in a book, an act in a play, or even one of the twelve books in the poem, *The Odyssey*, you capitalize the word "book" and "chapter":

- In Book Four, Odysseus' son talks with an old veteran of the Trojan War.
- In Act Two, Scene One, Hamlet finds himself in an untenable position.

However, if you refer to a book using a numeric adjective, or referring to books and acts in general, you do not capitalize it.

- In the opening scene of the second act of Hamlet, Hamlet finds himself in an untenable position.
- In the fourth book of The Odyssey, Odysseus' son talks with a veteran of the Trojan War.
- There are twelve books in The Odyssey and five acts in Hamlet.

## Writing Out Numbers:

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Style manuals for different fields and companies vary, which makes it hard to know when to write numbers out alphabetically ("sixteen") or numerically ("16"). This fact will be especially tricky for any of you who are journalism students because the standards for your discipline (AP or Associated Press style) are different from the MLA rules, which are standard for English literature classes.

In AP format, numbers between one and ten are written out alphabetically ("nine" as opposed to "9"), but typically numbers of 11 or higher are written in numeric form.

In MLA format, any number that can be written in two words is written out alphabetically, for instance, "twenty-one." Any number that cannot be written in two words should be typed in numeric form, for instance, "731" or "3.14159."

### There are some important exceptions:

- (1) Always use numerical form for addresses, statistics, percentages or decimals, page numbers, and the numbers in addresses.
- (2) Always use alphabetical form for numbers beginning sentences. (Avoid using a statistical number as the first word of a sentence if you can help it.)

For more information, see [Writing at Carson-Newman](#) pages 66-85, [The Bedford Handbook](#), pages 448-451, or [The MLA Handbook](#) 6th edition, pages 98-102.

### Pronouns: Agreement in Gender/Number

Writers often stumble when they come to pronouns and the antecedent of a pronoun. Sometimes when students try to avoid sexist language, they mistakenly resort to using plural pronouns such as *they* or *their* in reference to a singular subject. At other times, by sheer force of non-grammatical, everyday speech, writers slip into the use of plural pronouns with singular antecedents. Always be aware of how many people are in a sentence, and whether the antecedent to which a word refers is single or plural.

If you want to avoid sexist language, do not resort to awkward phrases like *his/her* or *him/her*. Likewise, do not resort to using *they* or *their* to refer to a singular subject. Instead, make the subject of your sentence plural and then use *their* or *them*. That way, a writer simultaneously avoids sexist language, improper grammar, and awkward phrasing.

- **Incorrect:** In the play, each character must keep their thoughts to themselves.
- **Okay but awkward:** In the play, each character must keep his/her thoughts to himself/herself.
- **Yes!** In the play, all characters must keep their thoughts to themselves.

Remember also that the words ending in *-body* and *-one* (*somebody*, *everyone*, *everybody*, etc.) are considered to be singular rather than plural. ("Everybody is coming to town," not "Everybody are coming to town.") Since these words are singular, normally they require a singular pronoun. "Everybody brought his book with him" is a traditional construction. On the other hand, "Everybody brought their book with them" is not considered correct in traditional grammar. To avoid sexist speech, the best suggestion is to pick a plural subject with which to begin the sentence. ("All of the students brought their books with them.")