

Integrating Quotations into Sentences

You should never have a quotation standing alone as a complete sentence, or, worse yet, as an incomplete sentence. Think of quotations as helium balloons. We all know what happens when you let go of a helium balloon: it flies away. In a way, the same thing happens when you present a quotation that is standing all by itself in your writing, a quotation that is not “held down” by one of your own sentences. The quotation will seem disconnected from your own thoughts and from the flow of your sentences. Ways to integrate quotations properly into your own sentences are explained below. Please note the punctuation leading into citations and around citations.

There are at least four ways to integrate quotations.

1. Introduce the quotation with a complete sentence and a colon.

Example: In “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” Thoreau states directly his purpose for going into the woods: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (36).

Example: Thoreau's philosophy might be summed up best by his repeated request for people to ignore the insignificant details of life: “Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!” (40).

Example: Thoreau ends his essay with a metaphor: “Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in” (49).

This is an easy rule to remember: if you use a complete sentence to introduce a quotation, you need a colon after the sentence. Be careful not to confuse a colon (:) with a semicolon (;). Using a comma is not acceptable because in this situation it will most likely create a comma splice (the joining, or “splicing” of two complete sentences with a comma), which is a serious sentence boundary error.

2. Use an introductory or explanatory phrase, but not a complete sentence, separated from the quotation with a comma.

Example: In “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” Thoreau states directly his purpose for going into the woods when he says, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (36).

Example: Thoreau suggests the consequences of making ourselves slaves to progress when he says, “We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us” (42).

Example: Thoreau asks, “Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life?” (47).

Example: According to Thoreau, “We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us” (42).

You should use a comma to separate your own words from the quotation when your introductory or explanatory phrase ends with a verb such as “says,” “said,” “thinks,” “believes,” “pondered,” “recalls,” “questions,” and “asks” (and many more). You should also use a comma when you introduce a quotation with a phrase such as “According to Thoreau.”

3. Make the quotation a part of your own sentence without any punctuation between your own words and the words you are quoting.

Example: In “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” Thoreau states directly his purpose for going into the woods when he says that “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (36).

Example: Thoreau suggests the consequences of making ourselves slaves to progress when he says that “We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us” (42).

Example: Thoreau argues that “shams and delusions are esteemed for soundest truths, while reality is fabulous” (48).

Example: According to Thoreau, people are too often “thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito’s wing that falls on the rails” (42).

Notice that the word “that” is used in three of the examples above, and when it is used as it is in the examples, “that” replaces the comma which would be necessary without “that” in the sentence. You usually have a choice, then, when you begin a sentence with a phrase such as “Thoreau says.” You either can add a comma after “says” (Thoreau says, “quotation”) or you can add the word “that” with no comma (Thoreau says that “quotation.”)

4. Use short quotations--only a few words--as part of your own sentence.

Example: In “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” Thoreau states that his retreat to the woods around Walden Pond was motivated by his desire “to live deliberately” and to face only “the essential facts of life” (36).

Example: Thoreau argues that people blindly accept “shams and delusions” as the “soundest truths,” while regarding reality as “fabulous” (48).

Example: Although Thoreau “drink[s] at” the stream of Time, he can “detect how shallow it is” (49).

When you integrate quotations in this way, you do not use any special punctuation. Instead, you should punctuate the sentence just as you would if all of the words were your own. No punctuation is needed in the sentences above in part because the sentences do

not follow the pattern explained under number 1 and 2 above: there is not a complete sentence in front of the quotations, and a word such as “says,” “said,” or “asks” does not appear directly in front of the quoted words.

All of the methods above for integrating quotations are correct, but you should avoid relying too much on just one method. You should instead use a variety of methods.

Notice the Punctuation!

Notice that there are only two punctuation marks that are used to introduce quotations: the comma (,) and the colon (:). Note that a semicolon (;) is not used to introduce quotations.

Notice as well the punctuation of the sentences above in relation to the quotations. If there are no parenthetical citations in the sentences (no author's name and page number in parentheses), the commas and periods go inside the final quotation mark (“like this.”). For whatever reason, this is the way we do it in America. In England, though, the commas and periods go outside of the final punctuation mark.

Semicolons and colons go outside of the final quotation mark (“like this”;;).

Question marks and exclamation points go outside of the final quotation mark if the punctuation mark is part of your sentence--your question or your exclamation (“like this”?). Those marks go inside of the final quotation mark if they are a part of the original--the writer's question or exclamation (“like this!”).

The Proper Punctuation (in summary):

Remembering just a few simple rules can help you use the correct punctuation as you introduce quotations. There are some exceptions to the rules below, but they should help you use the correct punctuation with quotations most of the time.

- **Rule 1:** Complete sentence: "quotation." (If you use a complete sentence to introduce a quotation, use a colon (:)) just before the quotation.)
- **Rule 2:** Someone says, "quotation." (If the word just before the quotation is a verb indicating someone uttering the quoted words, use a comma. Examples include the words "says," "said," "states," "asks," and "yells." But remember that there is no punctuation if the word "that" comes just before the quotation, as in "the narrator says that.")
- **Rule 3:** If Rules 1 and 2 do not apply, do not use any punctuation between your words and the quoted words.

Integrating Quotations and Citing Sources: Special Situations

Titles

The titles of texts are formatted so that the reader knows what kind of document he or she is reading about. The basic principle is that the titles of major works go in italics, while the titles of smaller works go in quotes.

The titles of...

novels and other **major narrative works** go in italics: *The Scarlet Letter*

plays go in italics: *The Crucible*

paintings and other **works of visual art** go in italics: *Kindred Spirits*

films go in italics: *When the Levees Broke*

symphonies go in italics: *Fanfare for the Common Man*

poems go in quotes: "To My Dear and Loving Husband"

songs go in quotes: "Go Down Moses"

sermons and speeches go in quotes: "A Model of Christian Charity"

chapters go in quotes: "The Truth about the First Thanksgiving"

articles go in quotes: "Slavery in the English Colonies"

things that are what they are only get capitalized: the Declaration of Independence

Very long titles may be abbreviated after their first use. So the title "Here Follow Some Verses upon the Burning of Our House July 10th, 1666" might sensibly be abbreviated as "Verses upon the Burning of Our House" or even—if the abbreviation risks no confusion—just "Verses."

Block Quotes

If a quote is four or more lines, it may make sense to turn it into a block quote, though long quotes are rarely necessary. After careful consideration you decide that you really need the whole quote, note that you do not use quotation marks and that the end punctuation precedes the citation. Indent the block quote one inch, as in this example from "Verses upon the Burning of Our House":

In silent night when rest I took
For sorrows near I did not look
I wakened was with thund'ring noise
And piteous shrieks of dreadful voice. (1-4)

Poetry

When integrating lines of poetry into an essay, remember two things:

- 1) Cite the line numbers, not the page number.
- 2) Preserve the line breaks (use a slash for non-block quotes) and capitalization.

Example: Bradstreet begins her poem about the burning of her house in Boston with a vivid image of her personal experience: "In silent night when rest I took/ ...I wakened was with thund'ring voice" (1-3).

[Note the ellipses (...) used to indicate that I have omitted part or all of one or more lines.]