EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT INTEGRATING QUOTATIONS INTO YOUR LITERARY ANALYSIS

PART 4: CHANGING QUOTATIONS

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PART 4: Making Changes to Quotations

Using Ellipsis and Square Brackets

[ word ]
Making Changes to Quotations: General Information

When you quote, you must duplicate the original accurately.

ALL changes to the original must be identified and must not change the original meaning.

- Use ellipsis points to remove material.
- Use square brackets to change or add material.
Using Ellipsis

Use ellipsis points to remove irrelevant or extraneous material from quoted passages.

The seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook* explains when to use ellipsis: “Whenever you wish to omit a word, a phrase, a sentence, or more from a quoted passage, you should be guided by two principles: fairness to the author quoted and the grammatical integrity of your writing . . . ” (97).

Always use ellipsis if you remove material from the middle of a quotation. Do not remove material that changes the meaning of the original.

Because all quoting involves using excerpts of the original, it is only necessary to use ellipsis if your reader can’t tell something has been removed from the excerpt you’re using.

- Only use ellipsis at the beginning of a quotation if the quotation starts with a capital letter but is not the beginning of a sentence.
- Only use ellipsis at the end of a quotation if the end is not the end of the sentence.
**Formatting Ellipsis**

**Ellipsis** is three spaced periods with a space before the first, between each, and after the last. Three spaced periods . . . are used in the middle of a single sentence.

A fourth period is needed if you are removing material between two complete sentences so as not to create a run-on. The fourth period is placed right next to the word at the end of the sentence. . . . The ellipsis (three spaced dots) comes after and replaces the material that is being removed, and then the next part of the quotation continues. The sentence before and the sentence after the ellipsis need to be complete sentences, and the first word of the new sentence needs to be capitalized (using square brackets if necessary—See the next section.).

In poetry, if you remove one or more lines from the middle of your long/blocked quotation, you replace them with one line of spaced dots the approximate length of the original lines.
Examples of Ellipsis in Prose & Poetry Quotations:

**PROSE:**
The gathering of the villagers is methodical, matter-of-fact: “The children assembled first, of course. . . . Soon the men began to gather, surveying their own children, speaking of planting and rain, tractors and taxes. . . . The women, wearing faded house dresses and sweaters, came shortly after their menfolk . . . and exchanged bits of gossip as they went to join their husbands” (Jackson 963-4). On the surface, everything appears normal down to the women’s gossip.

**POETRY:**
The third stanza does not bring us to a new image; rather, the “Ossified cords” (9) bring us back to “The dried mouthbones . . . // . . . of nothing / . . . scalded, toothless . . . , uncrushed, unstrung” (Pinsky 3, 5-6). We are inescapably focused on nothingness as being (fleshly existence) is stripped away, undone.
Examples of Ellipsis in Drama Quotations:

Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* opens with Orsino sighing for love:

If music be the food of love, play on,

Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,

The appetite may sicken, and so die.

O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,

That, notwithstanding thy capacity

Receiveth as the sea, naught enters there,

Of what validity and pitch soe’er,

But falls into abatement and low price

Even in a minute. . . . (1.1.1-3, 9-14; 27)

He calls love fickle, which will prove to be ironic later when he abruptly shifts his love from one woman to another.
Ellipsis & In-Text Citation

Because any amount of text may be removed, in-text citations may be affected.

- If the text is prose and comes all from the same page, the in-text citation is the same as any prose citation, just the page number: (964). If the text starts on one page and ends on the next, use a hyphen: (964-5). If the text starts on one page but skips the next page or pages, use a comma between the pages (964, 968). It is also possible to have a combination of these: (964, 968-9).

- If the text is poetry, the same rules apply but with line numbers: for text that comes from one line (5), for text that starts on one line and finishes on the next (5-6), for text that starts on one line but skips one or more (5, 8) or (5-6, 10).

- If the text is drama, again the same rules apply and the in-text citation depends on whether the text is prose or poetry and whether it identifies acts or scenes or acts and scenes and, in the case of poetry, lines, as well as if a page number is available.
Using Square Brackets

Use [Square Brackets] to make changes to quotations:

- **To add clarifying information**, such as the name of a character along with or in place of a pronoun, or a translation or definition to help your reader, etc.

- **To add emphasis** to draw the reader’s attention to your interpretation of the text.

- **To enable the quotation to fit grammatically into your sentence** by changing one or more of the following:
  - Pronouns.
  - Subject-Verb Agreement.
  - Verb tense.
  - Verb forms.
  - Capitalization.
Square Brackets go around the phrase, word, letters or letter, or punctuation that has been changed (or added).

**Note:** In some cases for example, when changing verb tense, the square brackets are placed around the space that is added in place of a letter, so “arranged” becomes “arrange[].”
Examples of Square Brackets:

Clarifying information added:
- We might also look again at those friendly villagers and see that the way “[the men] stood together, away from the pile of stones” along with the fact that “their jokes were quiet and they smiled rather than laughed” (Jackson 964) suggests their nervousness, and this nervousness, in turn, indicates their awareness that this is no ordinary day.

Verb Form Changed:
- The boys are described as active, aggressive, and independent, several of them together “ma[king] a great pile of stones . . . and guard[ing] it against the raids of the other boys” (Jackson 964). They are focused entirely on their own activity, using it to establish their dominance among themselves, apparently oblivious to the girls’ presence.

Multiple changes, including capitalization, verb tense, and addition of emphasis:
- No one, except the victim, is exempt from this violence, or blameless for it, as the story illustrates early on by having “[t]he children assemble[] first, [as a matter] of course” (Jackson 963), echoed at the end when “someone gave little Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles” (969). The diminutive phrase “little Davy Hutchinson” is transformed with the addition of “a few pebbles” so that in this context it no longer evokes innocence but culpability, showing us how the community teaches their traditions to the next generation, thus perpetuating those traditions and making sure everyone is equally guilty.