

Integrating Quotations into Sentences

You should never have a quotation standing alone as a complete sentence, or, worse yet, as an incomplete sentence in your writing. Quotations are like 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: it is correct.

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” (54).

Example: Macbeth’s relationship to violence is clearly shown when he realizes he cannot stop killing, and that he in fact needs to kill more: “I am in blood/
Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,/Returning were as tedious as go
o’er” (3.4.136-138).

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” (47).

Example: The witches’ prophecies set the play in motion, and show the nature of fate in the play: “They have met in the day of success, and I [Macbeth] have learned by the perfectest report they have more in them than mortal knowledge” (1.5.1-3).

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 in this situation will most likely create a comma splice, a serious sentence construction mistake.

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

Example: Early in the play Macbeth's first words highlight a major motif when he says, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1.3.38).

Example: King Duncan says, "There's no art/To find the mind's construction in the face./He was a gentleman on whom I built/An Absolute trust" (1.4.11-14).

Example: Shakespeare writes, "It will have blood, they say. Blood will have blood" (3.4.122).

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 Shakespeare."

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

Example: Shakespeare states directly the consequences of violence when he writes that "It will have blood, they say. Blood will have blood" (3.4.122).

Example: King Duncan makes clear that appearances are not to be trusted because "There's no art/To find the mind's construction in the face" (1.4.11-12).

Example: According to the play "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.12).

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 "Shakespeare writes." You can either add a comma after "writes" (Shakespeare writes, "quotation") or you can add the word "that" with no comma (Shakespeare writes that "quotation.")

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

Example: Shakespeare makes shows "blood will have blood" and that once a person starts on the road on violence that "Returning were as tedious as go o'er" (3.4.122 &137).

Example: Lady Macbeth, who tries to "beguile the time", illustrates the effect of supernatural events on time when she feels "The future in the instant" (1.5.65 &1.5.59).

Example: Although Macbeth has never seen a day “so foul and fair”, he cannot anticipate the depths of double meanings or conceive of the “devil speaking true” (1.3.38 & 1.3.109).

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 quotation, and a words such as “says,” “writes,” 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: 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.

The Proper Punctuation: Keeping it Simple

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.

And remember that a semicolon (;) never is used to introduce quotations.

Using Brackets and the Ellipsis

Brackets [] allow you to do two things 1. Change the author's original wording. 2. Add words for fluency or clarity.

Ellipsis (three dots...) allows you to delete a word or words from the original longer quote. **Note:** you do not need them at the beginning or end of a quote, even if you eliminate words. This is considered a snippet.