

chicago manual of style quoting poetry

Mastering the Art: Chicago Manual of Style Quoting Poetry

chicago manual of style quoting poetry presents a unique set of challenges and considerations for writers and editors alike, demanding precision and a deep understanding of literary conventions. Whether you are incorporating lyrical passages into an academic essay, a critical analysis, or a creative work, adhering to the guidelines set forth by the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) is paramount for clarity and academic integrity. This comprehensive guide will delve into the intricacies of quoting poetry according to CMOS, covering everything from short quotations integrated into prose to longer, indented verse. We will explore the nuances of line breaks, stanza breaks, punctuation, and the crucial distinction between block quotes and in-text citations, ensuring you can confidently present poetic excerpts with accuracy and stylistic finesse. Understanding these rules elevates your work from mere quotation to a sophisticated engagement with the source material, respecting both the original poem and the demands of academic presentation.

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Short Quotations: Integrating Poetry into Your Prose

When quoting short passages of poetry, the primary goal is to seamlessly integrate them into your own narrative or argumentative flow. The Chicago Manual of Style generally advises treating short quotations of poetry as part of your regular text, enclosed in

quotation marks. The length of the quotation is the determining factor for this approach. Typically, a short quotation encompasses one or two lines of verse, though the exact number can be flexible depending on the poem's structure and the desired emphasis.

The key principle here is to preserve the integrity of the poem's lineation as much as possible while ensuring it reads naturally within your prose. This means paying close attention to how line breaks in the original poem affect the rhythm and meaning, and how best to represent these within the constraints of your own sentence structure. Overly long short quotations can disrupt the reader's experience and may be better handled as a block quote.

Handling Line Breaks and Punctuation in Short Quotations

Representing line breaks accurately in short poetry quotations is crucial for conveying the poet's intent. When a quotation is short enough to be embedded within your prose, line breaks are indicated by a forward slash (/) followed by a space on each side. This slash signals the end of one line and the beginning of the next in the original poem. For example, if you are quoting the lines "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, / But I have promises to keep," you would represent it as: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, / But I have promises to keep."

Punctuation at the end of a quoted line should generally be retained as it appears in the original poem. If the original line ends with a period, comma, or other mark, it should be included in your quotation, maintaining the rhythm and grammatical structure. However, if the quoted line's punctuation would grammatically clash with the flow of your own sentence, CMOS offers flexibility. In such cases, you can often omit the original line-ending punctuation and allow your own sentence punctuation to govern the phrase. This requires careful judgment to ensure clarity and avoid misinterpretation.

When to Use Ellipses in Short Poetry Quotes

Ellipses (three periods, often with spaces around them: ...) are used in short poetry quotations to indicate omitted words or phrases from the original text. This is particularly useful when you need to excerpt a specific part of a line or a short sequence of lines without including extraneous words that do not serve your argument. CMOS specifies that ellipses should be used judiciously to avoid distorting the original meaning or intent of the poet. Ensure that the omission does not create ambiguity or misrepresent the source material.

For instance, if a line reads "And miles to go before I sleep," but you only need "miles to go," you would quote it as "...miles to go..." to show that words preceded and followed the excerpted phrase. If the omission occurs at the beginning or end of a quoted line and removes a substantial portion, it is customary to use four periods: the first acting as the period ending the preceding sentence (or the start of the line if it's the very beginning), and

the subsequent three forming the ellipsis. However, for simple omissions within a line that is already part of your prose, three periods are generally sufficient.

Longer Quotations: Creating Block Quotes for Poetry

When the poetic passage you wish to quote exceeds a certain length, the Chicago Manual of Style mandates that it be presented as a block quotation, also known as an indented quotation. This formatting distinguishes the quoted material from your own prose, giving it visual prominence and signifying its status as a distinct textual unit. While there is no strict line count, a common guideline is if a poem excerpt would span more than three lines when quoted as prose, it is often best presented as a block quote.

The purpose of the block quote is to allow the poem's structure, including its line breaks and stanza divisions, to be fully appreciated without the interruption of quotation marks and slashes. This visual separation is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the poetry's form and rhythm, especially when analyzing meter, rhyme, or visual layout. Presenting longer excerpts as block quotes demonstrates a deeper respect for the artistic choices made by the poet.

Indenting and Formatting Block Poetry Quotes

The standard formatting for a block quote in CMOS involves indenting the entire passage from the left margin. Typically, this is a half-inch or one-inch indentation, depending on the specific style guide or publisher's requirements, though a half-inch is very common. Crucially, block quotes are not enclosed in quotation marks. The indented format itself signifies that the text is a quotation. Each line of the poem within the block quote should be indented to its original position relative to the left margin of the poem itself, preserving its visual alignment.

When a block quote spans multiple stanzas, the spacing between stanzas in the original poem should be maintained. This means including an extra line space between stanzas within the block quote to mirror the original layout. This careful attention to spacing and indentation ensures that the visual and structural elements of the poem are accurately represented, allowing readers to engage with the poem's form as well as its content.

Preserving Original Punctuation and Capitalization

A cornerstone of quoting poetry, especially in block quotes, is the strict adherence to the original text's punctuation and capitalization. Unlike prose quotations where some minor adjustments might be permissible for grammatical flow within your own text, with poetry, especially verse, you are expected to reproduce it exactly as it appears. This includes

preserving all capitalization at the beginning of lines, internal punctuation, and any unusual or deliberate use of spacing or symbols.

This principle extends to any authorial choices that might seem unconventional. For example, if a poet chooses to begin every line with a lowercase letter, or uses punctuation in a non-standard way, you must replicate these features precisely. Any deviation from the original could alter the poem's intended rhythm, emphasis, or meaning. If you absolutely must omit a portion of the text within a block quote, you would use ellipses, but even then, care must be taken to ensure the omission does not fundamentally change the integrity of the passage.

Citing Poetry: Parenthetical and Note-Based Systems

The Chicago Manual of Style offers two primary citation systems: the author-date system (typically used in sciences and social sciences) and the notes-bibliography system (common in humanities, including literature and poetry analysis). Regardless of the system chosen, accurate citation is vital for giving credit to the source and allowing readers to locate the original work. For poetry, citations often include line numbers or page numbers, depending on how the poem is accessed.

In the notes-bibliography system, citations are usually provided in footnotes or endnotes. These notes typically include the author's name, title of the poem, title of the collection, and crucially, the page number or line numbers from which the quotation is taken. For poems that are widely known or available in standard editions, citing line numbers is often preferred, as it is more precise than page numbers which can vary between editions. For example, a note might read: "T.S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,' in *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), lines 3-4."

Footnotes and Endnotes for Poetry Citations

When employing the notes-bibliography system for quoting poetry, footnotes or endnotes serve as the primary mechanism for citation. Each quotation or direct reference to a poetic work should be accompanied by a corresponding note. The initial note for a specific source is typically more detailed, providing bibliographic information such as author, title, publication details, and the specific location of the quote (page or line numbers). Subsequent notes referring to the same source can be shortened, often using the author's last name and a page or line number reference, provided the full citation has already appeared.

The accuracy of these notes is paramount. For poetry, it is especially important to be consistent with how you reference line numbers. If the edition you are using numbers every line, use those numbers. If it only numbers stanzas or specific line groups, adapt accordingly but be clear in your methodology, perhaps explaining it in your bibliography. The goal is to make it as easy as possible for your reader to find the exact passage you are referencing in the original poem.

Special Considerations for Quoting Song Lyrics and Dramatic Verse

Quoting song lyrics and dramatic verse, while sharing some similarities with quoting lyrical poetry, also presents distinct considerations under the Chicago Manual of Style. Song lyrics often have a structure that mimics poetry, with verses, choruses, and bridges, and may require similar formatting regarding line breaks and indentation when quoted. However, the primary difference lies in copyright. Song lyrics are almost always protected by copyright, and depending on the length of the quotation and intended use, permission from the copyright holder may be required.

Dramatic verse, such as that found in Shakespearean plays, is typically cited by act, scene, and line numbers, rather than page or simple line numbers from a specific edition. This established convention allows readers to locate the text in any edition of the play. When quoting dramatic verse, you would integrate short snippets into your prose, using slashes for line breaks, and cite it accordingly, for example, (Hamlet, 3.1.56-58). Longer passages might be presented as block quotes, also citing act, scene, and line numbers. Always consult the specific edition's citation style if it offers unique guidance.

FAQ

Q: What is the primary rule for quoting short poetry passages in Chicago style?

A: The primary rule for short poetry quotations in Chicago style is to integrate them into your own prose, enclosed in quotation marks, and use forward slashes (/) with spaces on either side to indicate line breaks from the original poem.

Q: When should I use a block quote for poetry according to Chicago Manual of Style?

A: You should use a block quote for poetry when the passage is longer than two or three lines, or when you want to emphasize the poem's structure, lineation, and stanza breaks. Block quotes are indented and do not use quotation marks.

Q: How do I indicate omitted words in a poetry quotation in Chicago style?

A: You indicate omitted words in a poetry quotation using ellipses (...). For omissions at the beginning or end of a line that remove a substantial portion, four periods (....) may be used.

Q: Should I preserve the original capitalization and punctuation when quoting poetry in Chicago style?

A: Yes, it is essential to preserve the original capitalization and punctuation of poetry quotations precisely as they appear in the source text, especially in block quotes, to maintain the poet's original intent and form.

Q: What is the difference in citation between lyrical poetry and dramatic verse in Chicago style?

A: Lyrical poetry is typically cited with page or line numbers from a specific edition. Dramatic verse, however, is usually cited by act, scene, and line numbers, which are standardized across most editions.

Q: Can I alter punctuation at the end of a quoted line if it doesn't fit grammatically into my sentence?

A: While CMOS generally emphasizes preserving original punctuation, if a line-ending punctuation mark in a short, in-text poetry quote creates a grammatical conflict with your own sentence, you may omit it and let your sentence punctuation govern.

Q: How should spacing be handled between stanzas in a block quote of poetry?

A: Spacing between stanzas in a block quote of poetry should mirror the original poem. This typically means including an extra line space between the stanzas within the block quote.

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