CITING POETRY IN MLA STYLE

***Double-space everything! I have single-spaced this page only to save paper.*** *The examples on this page refer to William Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud” and Robert Lowell’s “Skunk Hour.”*

In parenthetical citations, cite line numbers, not stanza or page numbers:

The speaker of the poem observes “golden daffodils” (4).

It is also perfectly acceptable to embed the line number within your text, and in some cases it is easier for your reader if you mention the stanza number, especially if it’s a long poem with a number of stanzas. (Remember, the purpose of citations is to make it easy for your reader to find the material you are quoting.) If you have identified the line within your text, you don’t need to include a parenthetical citation.

In the third line of the second stanza, the speaker says the daffodils are arranged in “never-ending line.”

If you wish to quote two or three lines of a poem, use a slash with a space on each side ( / ) to indicate the line break:

At the beginning of the poem, the speaker emphasizes solitary wandering, describing how he “wandered lonely as a cloud / That floats on high o’er hills and vales” (1-2).

If you wish to quote more than three lines of a poem, you should start your quotation on a new line. Indent each line one inch (or more if the lines have unusual spacing—try to match the spacing of the original). Do not use quotation marks. Put the parenthetical citation *after* any concluding punctuation.

Wordsworth concludes the poem with a return to the sense of solitude introduced in the beginning:

 For oft, when on my couch I lie

 In vacant or in pensive mood,

 They flash upon that inward eye

 Which is the bliss of solitude;

 And then my heart with pleasure fills,

 And dances with the daffodils. (19-24)

If you want to start a quotation partway through a line, space it to match the original:

In Robert Lowell’s “Skunk Hour,” the solitary speaker describes “love-cars” parked at night on the hill of the village; the side-by-side placement of the cars, echoing the paired lovers within the vehicles, emphasizes the speaker’s loneliness:

 Lights turned down,

 they lay together, hull to hull,

 where the graveyard shelves on the town…. (27-29)

CITING PLAYS IN MLA STYLE

There is a different style for citing Shakespeare plays, other plays that specify line numbers, or other plays that have many short scenes. Use this guide for *Waiting for Godot,* which has only two acts. (I have used August Wilson’s *The Piano Lesson* for examples on this page.)

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Quote a single line (or part of a line) from a prose play exactly the way you would quote a sentence or part of a sentence from a novel or other piece of prose—put the line in quotations and cite the page number:

Despite the artistry and historical value of the intricately-carved instrument, Boy Willie says his father would have “traded that piano in for some land of his own” if he could have done so (46).

It is also perfectly acceptable to embed the page number within your text, and in some cases it is easier for your reader if you mention the act and/or scene number. (Remember, the purpose of citations is to make it easy for your reader to find the material you are quoting.) If you have identified the page number within your text, you don’t need to include a parenthetical citation.

On page 28, at the very beginning of Act I, Scene 2, Wining Boy admits his fear: “…I’ll tell you outright…if I see Sutter’s ghost I’ll be on the first thing I find that got wheels on it.”

Quote two or more lines of dialogue by setting the quotation off from your text. Indent one inch. Put each character’s name in capital letters. Follow the character’s name with a period, then the line of dialogue. Indent subsequent lines in the character’s speech an additional quarter inch (use your word processor’s hanging indent function). Put the page numbers in parentheses after any ending punctuation mark. Do not use quotation marks.

Lymon and Boy Willie bicker about Boy Willie’s likely fate:

 LYMON. That’s why you gonna end up back down there on the Parchman Farm.

 BOY WILLIE. I ain’t thinking about no Parchman Farm. You liable to go back before me.

 LYMON. They work you too hard down there. All that weeding and hoeing and chopping down trees. I didn’t like all that. (39)

Include any stage directions that appear within the dialogue—format them as they’re formatted in the original source (italicized, in the case of *Waiting for Godot).*

If you want to quote only a stage direction, cite it like any other quotation:

Wilson’s stage direction says that the men must “sing in harmony with great fervor and style” (39).