Integrating Quotations
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In the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Joseph Gibaldi writes:

> Quotations are effective in research papers when used selectively. Quote only words, phrases, lines, and passages that are particularly interesting, vivid, unusual, or apt, and keep all quotations as brief as possible. Over-quotation can bore your readers and might lead them to conclude that you are neither an original thinker nor a skilful writer.

> The accuracy of quotations in research writing is extremely important. They must reproduce the original sources exactly. Unless indicated in brackets or parentheses … changes must not be made in the spelling, capitalization, or interior punctuation of the source. *You must construct a clear, grammatically correct sentence that allows you to introduce or incorporate a quotation with complete accuracy. Alternatively, you may paraphrase the original and quote only fragments, which may be easier to integrate into the text.* If you change a quotation in any way, make the alteration clear to the reader…. (3.7.1, emphasis added)

By using a variety of methods to integrate quotations, a writer will make a paper seem much more engaged with the texts and illustrate his or her assertions much more persuasively than papers in which such integration is faulty or non-existent.

🖱 **Additional Information**

Please see "Formatting Quotations" for more information.

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The examples below will make use of the following two passages, one of poetry and one of prose:

Poetry:

> Me thinketh it accordant to resoun
> To telle you al the condicioun
> Of eech of hem, so as it seemed me,
> And whiche they were, and of what degree,
> And eek in what array that they were inn:
> And at a knight thanne wol I first biginne. (Chaucer 37-42)

Prose:

> The composition of none of the tales can be accurately dated; most of them were written during the last fourteen years of Chaucer's life, although a few were probably written earlier and inserted into *The Canterbury Tales*. The popularity of the poem in late medieval England is attested by the number of surviving manuscripts: more than eighty, none from Chaucer's lifetime. (Abrams 1:214).

Lack of Integration

It is stylistically incorrect to quote a direct quotation as a sentence on its own. Such a construction leaves unclear the connection between the author's argument and the quotation itself.

✗ Chaucer undertakes a description of each pilgrim. "Me thinketh it accordant to reason / To tell you al the condicioun / Of eech of hem" (37-39).

✗ Abrams discusses the date of composition of *The Canterbury Tales*. "The composition of none of the tales can be accurately dated; most of them were written during the last fourteen years of Chaucer's life" (1:214).

Faulty Integration

It is grammatically and stylistically incorrect to connect an argument and a direct quotation with a comma. Such a construction creates a comma splice, and it leaves unclear the connection between the author's argument and the quotation itself.

× Chaucer undertakes a description of each pilgrim, "Me thinketh it accordant to reason / To tell you al the condicioun / Of eech of hem" (37-39).

× Abrams discusses the date of composition of *The Canterbury Tales,* "The composition of none of the tales can be accurately dated; most of them were written during the last fourteen years of Chaucer's life" (1:214).

Weak Integration

It is grammatically correct to connect an argument and a direct quotation with a colon. Such a construction, however, still runs the risk of leaving unclear the connection between the author's argument and the quotation itself, and should therefore be used sparingly.

• Chaucer undertakes a description of each pilgrim: "Me thinketh it accordant to reason / To tell you al the condicioun / Of eech of hem" (37-39).

• Abrams discusses the date of composition of *The Canterbury Tales*: "The composition of none of the tales can be accurately dated; most of them were written during the last fourteen years of Chaucer's life" (1:214).

Acceptable Integration

It is grammatically and stylistically acceptable to integrate a direct quotation with a signal phrase and a comma, provided it does not result in a comma splice, and provided the author uses this method of integration sparingly.

✓ Chaucer undertakes a description of each pilgrim. He writes, "Me thinketh it accordant to reason / To tell you al the condicioun / Of eech of hem" (37-39).

✓ Abrams discusses the date of composition of *The Canterbury Tales.* "The composition of none of the tales can be accurately dated," he writes; "most of them were written during the last fourteen years of Chaucer's life" (1:214).

In most cases, the correct way to integrate a block quotation is to precede it with a colon. However, a large number of lengthy block quotations often occludes the voice of the essay's author, and should therefore be used sparingly.

✓ Chaucer undertakes a description of each pilgrim:

> Me thinketh it accordant to resoun
> To telle you al the condicioun
> Of eech of hem, so as it seemed me,
> .   .   .   .   .
> And eek in what array that they were inn:
> And at a knight thanne wol I first biginne. (37-42)

✓ Abrams discusses the date of composition of *The Canterbury Tales*:

> The composition of none of the tales can be accurately dated; most of them were written during the last fourteen years of Chaucer's life…. The popularity of the poem in late medieval England is attested by the number of surviving manuscripts: more than eighty, none from Chaucer's lifetime. (1:214)

Effective Integration

Sometimes it is beneficial to rephrase a quotation in your own words, that is, to use an indirect quotation. Be sure still to include the parenthetical citation to indicate the source.

✓ Chaucer tells the reader he intends to undertake a description of the social status and moral condition of each pilgrim, beginning with the Knight (37-42).

✓ Abrams notes the impossibility of dating *The Canterbury Tales* accurately, but he does point out that Chaucer probably composed most of the *Tales* during the latter fourteen years of his life (1:214).

Another effective way to integrate a direct textual quotation is to break it down and cite only the most illustrative words and phrases. This method is often the most effective way to integrate a direct quotation, as it shows the greatest degree of engagement with the texts in question. Use ellipses (…) to indicate omitted words and brackets ([ ]) to indicate interpolations.

✓ Chaucer "thinketh it accordant to resoun" to tell the reader "the condicioun" of each pilgrim, "And … of what degree" (37-40).

✓ Abrams points out that "none of [Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*] can be accurately dated," but that "most of them were written during the last fourteen years" of the poet's life (1:214).

Works Cited

Abrams, M.H., ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 7th ed,. 2 vols., Norton, 2000.

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Chaucer, Geoffrey. "The General Prologue." *The Canterbury Tales*. Abrams 1:215-35.

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