

Analyzing Poetry

In an essay about poetry, the poem or poems will be a primary source that you will be quoting to support your assertions and ideas. There are a number of guidelines to keep in mind.

Short quotations of three lines or less are enclosed within quotation marks and must fit grammatically into your own sentence. A slash, a diagonal line with a space on either side [/], is used to indicate the end of a line of poetry. For example,

Prufrock ruefully describes himself as “Deferential, glad to be of use, / Politic, cautious, and meticulous . . .” (115-16).

Two slashes indicate the end of a stanza [//].

Longer quotations (three lines or more) are set off from your own writing by double spacing before and after the quotation, indenting the quotation ten spaces, and double spacing the quotation. Quotation marks are not used unless they appear in the original. For example,

Marianne Moore’s “The Fish” shimmers with submerged light:

Split like spun

glass, move themselves with spotlight swiftness—

in and out, illuminating

the

turquoise sea (12-17)

Document your quotations by page number or by line number if the text you are using provides line numbers. Give the poet’s name, not the editor’s, in your parenthetical documentation. This means that the corresponding Works Cited entry must list a poem in an anthology under the poet’s name.

Eliot, T.S. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." *Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed.

M.H. Abrams et al. 5th ed. Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 1986. 2184-77. 2 vols. Print.

If you are discussing only one poem, you do not need to repeat the poet's name after the first parenthetical reference. The line or page number in parentheses will suffice. If you are discussing two or more poems, include the author's name in parentheses unless your context makes the source clear.