

Citing Shakespeare

In general, Shakespeare's plays have fairly standard Act, scene and line numbers. This standardization was done for ease of quotation, the same reason that the Bible and other classical texts such as *The Odyssey* have standard verse and line numbers. However, there are always variations. With Shakespeare, sometimes these are significant since his plays were not published until after his death and for some plays there is no definitive version. You need to include the particular edition you're quoting from in your Works Cited page. If your essay includes more than one play, indicate the play with the first significant words of the title in the play before your citation -- there are also [standard abbreviations for the plays](#) (as there are for books in the Bible) that you can use.

For internal citations: Use quotation marks around direct quotes. Provide the Act, scene and line numbers in parentheses after the quote: "Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on / The dashing rocks thy seasick weary bark!" (*Rom* 5.3. 117-118) If the text is written in **verse**, be sure to include the slash / between verse lines. If you are quoting **prose**, this isn't necessary. Be sure to keep all the punctuation in place that is there in the original text. However, if you are using a quote within your sentence, don't include the end punctuation of the quote:

Romeo says, "He jests at scars that never felt a wound" (2.2.1) to explain and forgive Mercutio's crude comments, a brilliant example of indirect characterization that, in very few words, gives us great insight into Mercutio's persona.

If you've already identified the play, you don't need to do so again: In *Julius Caesar*, Caesar says, "I am as constant as the Northern Star" (3.1.60).

If you have already identified the Act and scene, you don't need them in the citation: In Act 3, scene 2 of *Julius Caesar*, Antony claims to be "no orator" (219) but "a plain blunt man" (220) who has "neither wit, nor words, nor worth, / Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech / To stir men's blood. / I only speak right on" (223-225).

Note that "Act" is capitalized, but "scene" is not.

Epilogue: If the play has an epilogue, include the word in the citation: Prosepro says, "Now my charms are all o'erthrown, / And what strength I have 's mine own" (Epilogue 1-2).

Chorus: Shakespeare doesn't often include a chorus, but if there is one, or two, as in *Romeo and Juliet*: "But passion lends them power, time means, to meet, / Temp'ring extremities with extreme sweet" (2 Chorus 13-14).

Note that periods **go after the parentheses** at the end of a sentence. Other punctuation such as exclamation points and question marks stay inside the quotes. Other punctuation that doesn't end a sentence such as commas, colons and semicolons are eliminated if they end your quote.

Offset quotes: When you quote four lines or more of text, use an *offset* quote. **However, DO NOT use these in short essays. Save them for longer papers, and even then, only use one per paper when the full text is absolutely essential for analysis.** Indent to the tab and keep all text in the printed format, verse or prose. No quotation marks are needed:

Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasm, or a hideous dream:
The genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council; and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.

(*JC* 2.1.68-73)

PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE

TOPIC SENTENCE / QUOTES AS EVIDENCE / INTERPRETATION OF THE QUOTES

Assess Mercutio's personality in Act 2.1 and previously in the play. What can you say about his relationship to Romeo, his attitude towards love, his self-image, and how and why he treats others the way he does?

In Act 2.1, of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, when Romeo leaves Mercutio and Benvolio to climb the garden wall of the Capulet's orchard, Mercutio is very angry and envious, and shows his own negative perception of love. He thinks that Romeo has gone off to be with Rosaline. His feelings show when he tries to embarrass Romeo by shouting, rudely, that Romeo is all "sighs," and needs to be "conjured up" to be sexually ready for Rosaline (8-10). Although Benvolio tries to quiet him down, Mercutio continues to taunt Romeo, saying that his rude statements, "cannot anger him. 'Twould anger him / To raise a spirit in his mistress' circle / Of some strange nature, letting it there stand/Till she had laid it and conjured it down" (26-29), thereby suggesting that although Romeo cannot seem to conquer Rosaline, someone else might. He ends by suggesting that Romeo's love for Rosaline is "blind" and will never "hit the mark" (36). All of these statements on the surface seem to be simply caustic teasing, but combined with Mercutio's previous negative statements about love, his negative image of himself, and with Romeo's assertion that Mercutio "jests at scars that never felt a wound" (2.2.1) we can assume that Mercutio's crude remarks belie his own bitterness, lack of self-esteem, and envy. Mercutio clearly has little regard for himself:

Give me a case to put my visage in.—

A visor for a visor. What care I

What curious eye doth cote deformities?

Here are the beetle brows shall blush for me.

(1.4.29-32)

Perhaps he wishes he were the one to give the others the slip, and that perhaps he, with a partner, would not find the "field-bed" (2.1.43) so cold. Romeo, however, does not feel bitterness towards his friend Mercutio, but rather, is compassionate and understanding: Perhaps Mercutio is suffering more from jealousy than envy.