



MLA Eighth Edition Style: Poetry

You need to be careful about how to mention who is speaking. In poetry, the voice that is telling the story to the reader is “**the speaker**.” Using the narrator, author, or poet would be incorrect. Readers cannot assume that the opinions, descriptions, and observations in the poem are those of the writer. All poems contain a voice, but readers cannot discern whether it is the voice of the writer, or a fictional character that may in fact narrate.

The speaker in “Sonnet 138” is an aging lover who realizes the value of little white lies.

Titles of poems are enclosed in quotation marks. They are not italicized, underlined, or bolded.

My favorite poem is “The Hymn of a Fat Woman” by Joyce Huff.

When **quoting 2-3 lines of poetry**, place the lines inside quotation marks within your text. Notice that in the example below the page numbers are not cited. Instead, writers use the line numbers that are enclosed in parenthesis. The in-text citation is at the end of the sentence, but before the ending punctuation. The **forward slash** indicates to your reader where the line breaks fall.

The speaker in “Ozymandias” quotes another speaker, who says, “Two vast and trunkless legs of stone / Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand, / Half sunk a shattered visage lies” (2-4).

When a **stanza break** occurs in the middle of your quotation, mark it with **2 forward slashes**. Notice that the in-text citation shows that the first line and the lines 7-8 are cited. You can note this with a comma between the sets of lines for the in-text citation, and ellipsis in the quote.

In Margaret Atwood’s poem “Backdrop addresses cowboy,” the speaker’s assertions in simple language make a strong point: “Starspangled cowboy... // you are innocent as a bathtub / full of bullets” (1, 7-8).

If you quote **more than three lines of poetry**, indent each line 10 spaces (2 tabs). You would no longer need to use the forward slash between lines. Instead each line of poetry is on a new line in the essay. The line numbers follow the end punctuation:

In a contemporary poem about Jack and the candlestick, Jack is described briefly by the speaker:

Jack gave the beanstalk
A mighty big kick.
Down came the giant –
GIGANTIC fall – (3-6)

If the citation does not fit on the same line as the end of the quotation, it should be placed on a new line, flush with the right margin. Refrain from changing any capitalization or punctuation. If the end of the quoted line contains punctuation of any kind, and its use makes your sentence incorrect, drop the punctuation.

If you work with a lengthy poem, you might cite the canto, a type of division for long narrative poems and epics, rather than line numbers.

Here is how a poem should appear on your Work Cited list:

Works Cited
<p>Poet’s last name, First name. “Poem Title.” <i>Title of Collection</i>, edited by Editor’s Name(s), Publisher, Year, Page range of poem.</p>
<p>Yeats, William Butler. “The Lake Isle of Innisfree.” <i>Inside Literature</i>, edited by R.S. Gwynn and Steven J. Zani. Pearson/Longman, 2007, 393.</p>