

Quoting From A Poem

When you write about a poem or refer to a poem in an essay, you will frequently need to quote from it. Below are some rules to follow when you quote the words or title of a poem.

Rule 1: Whenever you mention the title of a poem, put quotation marks around it.

William Stafford's free verse poem "Traveling Through the Dark," effectively conveys to the reader that technological and human impact upon wildlife is destructive.

Rule 2: Whenever you quote a word or phrase that appears in a poem, put quotation marks around it. The line number or range of line numbers that the quote appears on are put in brackets at the end of the quote. If a punctuation mark is needed, it is put at the end of the brackets.

The dead doe's body is reduced to a mangled and lifeless "heap" (6) of deer limbs.

Rule 3: Integrate the quoted material within your sentence.

The speaker notes the temperature of the "almost cold" (7) doe carcass and its "warm" (10) pregnant side.

Square brackets allow you to add your own words to change a quote to make it fit within a sentence.

The car comes alive by "aim[ing] ahead its lowered parking lights" (13) and "purr[ing] [its] steady engine" (14).

Rule 4: Whenever you quote a phrase that begins on one line but ends on the next, indicate where the first line stops by using a slash mark.

Stafford describes his real life experience of finding "a deer / dead on the edge of the Wilson River road" (1-2) in Tillamook, Oregon.

Rule 5: Whenever you quote four or more lines, indent the passage from both margins, but do not use quotation marks. Cite such a long passage only if it is especially significant. Introduce the quotation, copy the lines, and then explain the relevance of the quotation afterwards.

The speaker tells us that while

traveling through the dark [he] found a deer

dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.

It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:

that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead. (1-4)

We assume that the deer has been hit by a car, since it is not unusual to find dead deer along this road.