

Notes on Writing about Literature: A Brief Guide to Better Writing
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Making Quotations Fit Grammatically

It is important to fit anything that you are quoting into the grammar of your own sentences. If you want to quote only part of a sentence from the text you are discussing, you must add words of your own, outside the quotation marks, to make it a complete sentence. If you are quoting a complete sentence, be sure that any words of your own that you add do not make it ungrammatical. Here is a part of a sentence from an essay on Dante's *Inferno* that has not been fit smoothly into the writer's own sentence:

While the gluttons writhe in the slime and garbage, they are tormented by Cerberus, who "barking thunder on these dead souls, who wished that they were deaf" (*Inferno*, Canto VI, ll. 32-33). Since they wallowed in food and drink in life and produced nothing but garbage, in death they wallow in garbage and get nothing to eat or drink.

By removing the first "who" or by adding "was," the sentence with its quotation will read more grammatically:

While the gluttons writhe in the slime and garbage, they are tormented by Cerberus, "barking thunder on these dead souls, who wished that they were deaf" (*Inferno*, ll. 32-33). Since they wallowed in food and drink in life and produced nothing but garbage, in death they wallow in garbage and get nothing to eat or drink.

OR

While the gluttons writhe in the slime and garbage, they are tormented by Cerberus, who was "barking thunder on these dead souls, who wished that they were deaf" (*Inferno*, Canto VI, ll. 32-33). Since they wallowed in food and drink in life and produced nothing but garbage, in death they wallow in garbage and get nothing to eat or drink.

Here is another example of a poorly integrated quotation; it is a complete sentence plus part of another sentence whose subject and verb have been omitted. The result is very difficult to understand:

One punishment similar to the sin being punished is the one for those who misused their wealth while they were on earth. As Dante says, “the sound of their own screams, straining their chests, they rolled enormous weights/ and when they met and clashed against each other/ they turned to push the other way” (*Inferno*, Canto VII, ll. 25-29). Because they fought with one another on earth over wealth, they clash in hell, punishing one another.

We can fix the problem by omitting the first part of the quotation, or by adding words:

One punishment similar to the sin being punished is the one for those who misused their wealth while they were on earth. As Dante describes these sinners, “straining their chests, they rolled enormous weights/ and when they met and clashed against each other/ they turned to push the other way” (*Inferno*, Canto VII, ll. 25-29). Because they fought with one another on earth over wealth, they clash in hell, punishing one another.

OR

One punishment similar to the sin being punished is the one for those who misused their wealth while they were on earth. As Dante says, these sinners move to “the sound of their own screams,” and, “straining their chests, they rolled enormous weights/ and when they met and clashed against each other/ they turned to push the other way” (*Inferno*, Canto VII, ll. 25-29). Because they fought with one another on earth over wealth, they clash in hell, punishing one another.