How to Cite a Poem in a Paragraph

One of the most important aspects of writing an essay is properly citing quotations from your sources. Most college and high school essays adhere to Modern Language Association guidelines, particularly in English and humanities classes. While the information in poetry citations are similar in any paragraph, formatting the citation differs, depending on how many lines of poetry are being cited.

Setting Up a Quote

Following MLA style guidelines, quote's context is set up and the poem's name is given before discussing the quote in your paper. The poem's title is enclosed in quotation marks.

For example: In the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the poet utilizes alliteration.

Quoting a Single Line of Poetry

In MLA style, a single line of poetry is enclosed in quotation marks. The poet's name and the line number of the quotation are placed in parentheses directly following the quoted line. The final period following the quote is placed after the parentheses.

**For example:** The Mariner describes himself as possessing “strange powers of speech” (Coleridge 16).

Quoting Up to Three Lines of Poetry

When quoting more than one line of poetry, the quote is formatted differently than when quoting only one line. In MLA style, rather than embedding the quote into a sentence unaltered, two or more lines are separated by slash marks to indicate that they are separate lines of poetry.

**For example:** Once the men have died and the sailor is left alone, he describes an awful sight, saying, "beyond the shadow of the ship / I watched the water-snakes / they moved in tracks of shining white" (Coleridge 35-37).

Quoting More Than Four Lines

MLA style indicates that when quoting four or more lines of poetry, a block format is used. Rather than putting the quoted lines within quotation marks, they are separated from the rest of the paragraph by one line and indented 10 spaces, one inch from the margin. Unlike shorter lines, the in-text citation is placed after the closing punctuation mark rather than before.

**For example:** The mariner inspires fear in the guest:

 I fear thee, ancient Mariner!

 I fear thy skinny hand!

 And thou art long, and lank, and brown,

 As is the ribbed sea-sand. (Coleridge 85-88)