

Brackets and Ellipses—Clarifying Quoted Material

When quoting external sources in your paper, it is important to quote only the information you need to make your point. If you intend to comment on three particular lines from a paragraph, then quote only those lines. Use an ellipsis to signal omissions in quoted material. Use brackets to insert clarifying information into a quotation.

For example, say you wanted to use the following quotation in a paper on American Musical Theatre, but were only interested in the last few statements:

“Tony Award-winners Bernadette Peters, Joanna Gleason and the rest of the original Broadway cast weave their magic spell over you in this masterful presentation of Stephen Sondheim’s musical classic, Into the Woods, a seamless fusion of fairytales that strikes at the child’s heart within us all.”

To omit information within the quotation, use an ellipsis (a series of three periods with a space before and after each period).

According to one critic, “Sondheim . . . strikes at the child’s heart within us all.”

Note that the quotation does not begin with the ellipsis. The quotation marks are sufficient to signal the beginning of your quoted material. Use an ellipsis to indicate omissions in the middle or at the end of a quoted sentence. If you have omitted words at the end of a quoted sentence, the ellipsis must be followed by a period.

Sondheim’s play centres around “a seamless fusion of fairytales”

You

should also use an ellipsis followed by a period to signal the omission of a complete sentence in quoted material.

Sometimes, for quotations to make grammatical sense in your sentence, it is necessary to insert extra information. Use brackets (not parentheses) to add any necessary verbs or phrases to the quotation.

According to one critic, “Sondheim’s musical classic, Into the Woods, [weaves] a seamless fusion of fairytales that strikes at the child’s heart within us all.”

Remember, whenever you use quoted material, integrate it into the natural grammar of your sentence. Avoid free-floating quotations; instead, connect quoted material grammatically to your own writing. The integrated sentence should sound like a single, coherent sentence when read aloud (i.e. consistent verb tense, singulars and plurals etc.), not like two separate sentences jammed together.