Poetry in MLA Format: Block Quotes

Q: When do I use a block quote?
A: If you quote four complete lines of poetry or more, you must format it as a block quote!

Main Rules:

- Transition from your paragraph into the block quote using a colon.
- Continue the pattern of double-spacing your text.
- Indent 1 inch from the left margin.
- Do not use quotation marks around block quoted text. (It’s in block quote format; we know it’s a quote.)
- The parenthetical citation goes on the last line of the block quoted text, outside any punctuation.
- Keep any line breaks that appear in the text, starting a new line each time the poem does.

Quoting Left-Justified Poetry

Example:
As Wendy Cope notes in “Emily Dickinson”:

Higgledy-piggledy

Emily Dickinson

Liked to use dashes

Instead of full stops. (1-4)

Quoting Poetry with Weird Structure

- Try to duplicate any blank spaces that appear in the structure of the poem.

Example:
E. E. Cummings is known for rebellious approach to language conventions in his poetry. For example, one of his poems is titled “[in Just-]” and reads:

it’s

spring

and

the

goat-footed

balloonMan whistles (16-21)
Quoting Verse Dialogue from Plays

- Include the speaking character’s name in capital letters with a period at the end.
- Start a new line when a new character speaks.
- Try to duplicate any blank spaces that appear in the structure of the dialogue.
- When a character’s dialogue continues onto a new line, indent the new line an additional ¼ inch.

Example:
*Hamlet* opens with two guards discussing the uneventful, though chilly, night:

FRANCISCO. For this relief much thanks. ‘Tis bitter cold,

And I am sick at heart.

BERNARDO. Have you had a quiet guard?

FRANCISCO. Not a mouse stirring. (Shakespeare 1.1.8-10)