Writing a Paper or a Paraphrase

Formatting and revising your paper
Revision sheet
Rhetorical language (tropes and schemes)
Note on style
General directions for paraphrasing
Specimen paraphrases
Finding an argument

FORMATTING AND REVISIONING YOUR PAPER

Format and quotations

All papers should be double-spaced throughout except for the quotations, which should be single-spaced and indented. [Don’t be misled by the format of the Shakespeare paraphrases elsewhere in this link. In those, paraphrase and quotation alike have been single-spaced to keep the PDF text together.] Omit quotation marks when you indent, but keep any quotations found in the quoted text. To indicate a quotation nested within a quotation, switch to single quotation marks or apostrophes (‘’); see the three-line quotation from a paper on Hamlet in the next paragraph.

Don’t indent poetry if you are quoting three lines or fewer. Just run them into your text: “Longing to put an end to the ‘Calamity’ that his life has become, Hamlet pauses to reflect (Ham. 3.1.67–69). ‘For . . . what dreams may come / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil / Must give us pause. There’s the respect ,’ etc.” Note the spaced slash marks separating the lines and the three spaced periods to indicate an omission or hiatus [Latin for “gap” or “eleft,” from a verb meaning “to yawn”]. Hiatuses (also called elisions) should only be used within a quotation. You needn’t begin your quotation with a hiatus; your reader can see that you’ve adapted the material to your own text and have left out whatever preceded. Any sentence that starts with a quotation must capitalize its initial letter. All run-in quotations should fit smoothly into the grammar and syntax of your own sentence; even a longer, indented quotation (unless you choose to introduce it with a colon) should flow syntactically from—and should complete—the sentence you write to introduce it, rearranging the quotation itself if necessary. For example,

In Paradise Lost, Milton invokes God’s creative spirit, praying it will “[illumine] what in me is dark”

[and] what is low raise and support,
That to the hight of this great argument
I may assert eternal providence,
And justify the ways of God to men. (PL 1.22–26)

Note that quotation marks are omitted from the indented lines and that brackets are used to warn the reader that your run-in quotation rearranges Milton’s lines 22–23, which actually read: “what in me is dark / Illumine, what is low,” etc.

You should also indent any PROSE quotation that takes up more than three lines of the paper you are writing. In quoting prose, don’t separate the lines with a slash as you do in quoting poetry. You can’t mirror the prose text you are quoting, because editions use various fonts and column widths. Don’t try to reproduce these in your paper; just try to match up lines of poetry. Here’s how to quote several lines of Milton’s prose in your paper without using indentation:

"Longing to put an end to the ‘Calamity’ that his life has become, Hamlet pauses to reflect (Ham. 3.1.67–69). ‘For . . . what dreams may come / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil / Must give us pause. There’s the respect ,’ etc.” Note the spaced slash marks separating the lines and the three spaced periods to indicate an omission or hiatus [Latin for “gap” or “eleft,” from a verb meaning “to yawn”]. Hiatuses (also called elisions) should only be used within a quotation. You needn’t begin your quotation with a hiatus; your reader can see that you’ve adapted the material to your own text and have left out whatever preceded. Any sentence that starts with a quotation must capitalize its initial letter. All run-in quotations should fit smoothly into the grammar and syntax of your own sentence; even a longer, indented quotation (unless you choose to introduce it with a colon) should flow syntactically from—and should complete—the sentence you write to introduce it, rearranging the quotation itself if necessary. For example,

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“In Areopagitica, Milton notes that ‘the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil . . . that [Psyche’s] confused seeds . . . were not more intermixed . . . And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say, of knowing good by evil’ (Kerrigan ed., 939).” [Again, both single and double quotation marks are used here to show I’m quoting this example from a paper. The original paper, of course, would put (double) marks only around the quoted text; see the example from King Lear, below.]

Special rules apply when referring to or quoting from the Bible. DO NOT italicize/underline its title (“the Bible”) or the names of its books; note also that the adjective “biblical” is not capitalized. Always cite the book’s title (abbreviated if you like) followed by the chapter, a colon, and the number of the verse or range of verses. E.g., Genesis 22:1–12; Eccl. 3:11 (or Ecclesiastes 3:11). Neither should you italicize the different versions of the Bible, such as the New Testament, the King James Version (KJV), the Norton Bible, the Geneva Bible, the Jewish Bible, etc. Here is an example:

We learn in Genesis 22 that “God did tempt Abraham” by commanding him to “offer [his only son, Isaac] . . . for a burnt offering,” and that Abraham obeyed. He and Isaac, with their ass and two servants, traveled three days to the appointed place, whereupon “Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.” The firewood borne by the ass is now transferred to Isaac, who trusts his father as unquestioningly as Abraham trusts God. “My father,” the boy said, “[I] see the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” The poignant reply made by Abraham distills, in its profound irony, either his buoyant faith or his resigned despair—we cannot tell which. “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for the burnt offering.” (22:1–8)

Notice that any omission—of a word, of a phrase, of one or more sentences—gets marked either by inserting the same three spaced periods or/and by substituting words in square brackets. Note too in these examples how the parenthetical citation is placed between the quotation marks and the period when you run the quotation (from Areopagitica, e.g.) into your text; whereas indented quotations, like this paragraph from an essay on the Bible, locate the parenthesis after the final period and set it off by extra spaces (compare the PL quotation, above; also, the paraphrase specimens, below).

For the kind of paper required in this course, use parenthetical citations to refer to any of the author’s works that we actually read. Parenthetical citations are more practical than footnotes, which distract your reader. Secondary sources can be added in a bibliography; you can cite them also in a parenthesis at the end of the sentence giving the critic’s or the editor’s name along with the page number of their book: “(Kerrigan ed., 939); “(Bevington ed., xlvii).” Quotations from a long poem should be identified by the poem’s title (italicized and abbreviated) followed by the section or book with line numbers: “‘Greedily she engorged without restraint, / And knew not eating death’ (PL 9.791–92).” (Here, I’ve put single quotation marks or apostrophes around the lines cited in the paper I’m quoting. If this sounds algebraic, don’t worry; just remember to start with double quotation marks and then—as you quote on another level—alternate with single quotation marks. A third level nested inside the second would alternate again to double marks.)

Use a similar format for parenthetical citations of dramatic speeches. Your first citation should identify the play, act, scene, and line(s) quoted. A citation of The Taming of the Shrew would look like this: Shrew 3.1.16–18 (note abbreviated, italicized title; no commas; two digits for line numbers from 10 to 99 and for the ending line above 110: e.g., 3.2.138–42). [The first ten digits of each century unit get special treatment: e.g., 305–9; 100–2; but 110–11.] Once it is clear what scene you are referring to—in this case, the first scene of act 3 between Bianca and her disguised lover—you don’t need to repeat title/act/scene; just cite the lines in a parenthesis: “I trust you not” (42–43). Again, note that the parenthesis goes outside the quotation, with period after parenthesis. If you want to summarize and partly quote a speech in your argument, you don’t need a parenthesis to identify the quotation. Just identify the lines: “Bianca lets her disguised tutor know in lines 41–44 that she’s willing to go along with his ruse, but she also says, ‘I trust you not,’ and she tells him he should neither presume nor despair.” Note that all commas and periods go inside any adjacent
Quotation marks in an American text (British texts follow a different convention). Other punctuation that you’ve added to the quoted text—colons, semicolons, question marks and exclamation points—goes outside the quotation marks: e.g. (1) “How many readers hear the irony when Eve says at 9.811, ‘I perhaps am secret’?” (2) Kent alone realizes that Lear is dead and exclaims, “Vex not his ghost”! [Example (2) is not framed by quotation marks because it’s not quoted from a paper; rather, it represents the present writer (me) adding his own emphasis to Kent’s words.]

Caution: do not put “warning quotes” around words to indicate inexact meanings. Find the right word for what you want to say and use the word(s) without any q.-marks. Quotation marks should be reserved for quoted texts only.
REVISION SHEET: CORRECTING THE FORMAT

F  Check the “Formatting” section, above.

₅  Delete (this symbol also forms the tail of a line drawn through the words deleted).

₈, ₉  Insert at this point (the inverted carat is used to locate quotation marks and apostrophes).

./;  Use period/colon/semicolon.

₀  Close the gap (or delete the space) between characters.

#  Open a gap (insert a space between two characters).

( )  Use parenthesis.

caps  Capitalize the double-underlined letter(s).

ital  Underline or use italics.

lc.  Change capitalized letter(s) to lower case.

sp  Spelling is wrong. Or: spell out the number circled.

tr.  ~  Transpose (switch the positions of comma and quotation marks; or the order of the words; etc.).

//  Make clauses or phrases parallel (see antithesis, under “Rhetorical language,” below).

REVISIFYING THE STYLE

awk  The phrase/clause/sentence is clumsy, ambiguous, or unidiomatic. (Correct writers would call it a solecism.)

Cna  The content of your statement or proposition needs analysis. To make it more precise, consider what you don’t mean, then restate your meaning in words or phrases quoted from the author’s text—or lifted from your own.

dm  This modifying clause or phrase is detached from the noun or verb (or clause) it modifies.

imp  Impersonal or indefinite subject. Try to rewrite without using it is, there are, or there is.

M  Check the metaphor (especially in a paraphrase). See section on “Rhetorical language,” below.

ref  Ambiguous or unclear reference (it, they, which, these, this).

rep  Repetitive or redundant language (words or statements with the same meanings).

vb  “Is” (or some form of be) joins subject to predicate; find a more significant, expressive verb (other than have).

ww  Word or phrase used wrongly; look it up in the dictionary.

[Pr]  Badly written sentences(s); check your predication (i.e., examine the sentence’s skeletal subject + verb). You must rewrite sentences bracketed “[Pr(edication)]; they contain one or more of these faults:

—Fragment (a sentence lacking its predicate); run-on (sentences spliced together with commas. Use periods/semicolons).
—Wordiness (whenever you can possibly cut a word out, always cut it out).
—Nouns or noun phrases used adjectivally (e.g. “The space-station scientists made a new asteroid discovery”). Avoid.
—Unnecessary prepositional phrases (with prepositions by, of, for, from, as in the example below); see also dm and vb.
—Overusing passive construction (subject + “is” [be] + participle, as below); change the verb to make the subject active.
—Vague or general formulations that need analyzing (e.g., “the feminist notion of patriarchy”); see also cna.

BAD SENTENCE: “A literary text of the Bible cannot be read properly unless an analysis is made of its structure.”
REVISED: “To read a biblical text properly, you need to analyze its literary structure.”
RHETORICAL LANGUAGE (TROPES AND SCHEMES)

A **trope** (Greek word for “turn”) refers to language that is used figuratively—i.e., turned or wrested from its literal meaning. The most basic trope is **metaphor** (Greek for “transfer”). Both words mean literally “carry across”: the name of a thing or an activity is carried across to another thing or action. In other words, a metaphor is a trope that **turns** something by **misnaming** it. This deliberate misnaming gives us pleasure because it brings out an unexpected identity (or similarity—whence **simile**) between two things or between different ideas not usually connected. In his Sonnet 18 comparing his young friend to “a summer’s day,” Shakespeare writes, “Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines.” Here the word eye is misapplied to the sun, and the transfer or trope allows the poet to convey the powerful effect of the young man’s glance. He makes the shining sun a vehicle to bring out the similarity between the youth’s gaze and a summer day, noting at the same time a difference: the youth’s gaze is “more temperate.” A similitude never aims at achieving exact resemblance; every metaphor is going to reflect difference as well as identity. Here, we understand that an eye does not “shine” with heat as the sun does; the young man’s gaze “is more lovely and more temperate.”

When you analyze figurative language, always look for the actual vehicle used in the misnaming or transfer. Once you’ve identified the concrete thing (e.g., a part of the body) or specific activity (e.g., a trade or skill) or physical event (e.g., the “rough winds [that] shake the darling buds of May”) that serves as the vehicle, you’ll be able to recognize both similarity and difference in the metaphor.

**Metonymy and personification.** Metonymy (literally, “by-name”) is metaphor based on association instead of upon similarity. Because the “transfer” does not reveal a natural resemblance but merely links together or names things customarily associated, you have to seek the meaning of metonymy in literary convention and symbolic tradition. Any symbol is metonymy, including even a so-called pictograph that is supposed to resemble the thing it names. A reader ignorant of the conventional meanings would never be able to guess that the sign ☽ refers to women or ☽ to men. A skeleton is metonymous for death—not because it resembles death (which is invisible), but because it is associated with death as an effect is associated with its cause. A conventional metonymy may strike us as natural or intuitive: a snake, for example, is a natural symbol for evil in some cultures. But this conventional link (snake = evil) does not rest on actual resemblance; rather, it arises from our atavistic habit of associating the snake with our fears—a defensive instinct that we perhaps learned when we were tree-dwellers, and that other cultures have learned to modify. For example, in literary convention—if not in our actual experience—the serpent can symbolize a wise and devious prudence.

Note that what the snake stands for in these metonymic tropes—evil or wisdom—is an abstraction (a “universal”) rather than a tangible, concrete thing (“concrete” means literally grown together). This metonymic type of metaphorical transfer can become personification. In a personification, the metonymous vehicle transfers concrete, physical attributes to the abstraction, often giving it a proper (capitalized) name. For example, Jealousy is personified as a yellow-faced woman tormented by serpents; Hope is a cheerful, extroverted woman dressed in blue; Melancholy is introverted and dressed in black. Victory is imagined with wings hovering over an army; see the Nike ad (“ niké” means “victory” in Greek) featuring an airborne Michael Jordan. Lust—for reasons buried in folkloric tradition—is personified by a goat (whence the quaint adjective “goatish” = lecherous).

In sum, personification humanizes an abstraction by giving it purpose or pathos (feelings). A generalized, abstract noun (e.g., “winter’s wind,” “mine own fears,” “idleness”) does not become personification until it’s assigned an animate purpose or a passion. In **AYL** 2.1, the winter wind bites with its “icy fang”; in Sonnet 107, the poet’s fears are part of “the prophetic soul / Of the wide world”; in **IH4** 1.2, Hal’s phrase, “unyoked humor of . . . idleness” sets free Idleness (personified here as the “humor” that rules Falstaff and his tavern companions) to stray like oxen released from their “yoke.” Shakespeare’s characters use personification in their speeches either to show off their wit or, more seriously, to
signal their heightened mental activity as they contemplate human “universals,” such as love and grief, that affect our life. When we think of Time or Death or the Law as our enemies, we are personifying them. Shakespeare’s audience found it easier than we do to visualize these abstract universals concretely. For example, they pictured Love (note the capitalized name) as blindfolded Cupid. Often Shakespeare’s personifications are related to one another like members of a metaphorical society: they become more concrete when we can locate them in an imagined scene or pageant.

**Irony** is the trope most commonly used in literature. Note how closely the definition of irony—saying one thing while meaning another—matches the art of “troping” (turning or wresting the meaning of words). Anybody can use irony artlessly in the form of sarcasm or understatement (e.g., remarking about someone who makes a social blunder, “I admire her tact!”; or telling a chronic whiner, “Thank you for sharing your troubles”). In literature, irony is not just used for mocking. An **allegory** like Pilgrim’s Progress is a work of irony throughout; the author, John Bunyan, narrates Christian’s spiritual discovery of Heaven as if the hero were making a journey through the world, with its distractions like “Vanity Fair” and dangerous foes such as the “Giant Despair.” The author of The Faerie Queene, Edmund Spenser, explains that his work is “a continued Allegory, or darke conceit [i.e., trope].”

**Dramatic irony** refers to the gap between what the author and audience know and what characters in the play know. It can be defined as the dramatic situation that arises when a character’s perceptions or purpose are clearly at odds with what we know to be the actual—or, as the drama unfolds, the eventual—state of affairs. Good books or plays have to be read a second time to get a full appreciation of their dramatic irony.

**Schemes** are word patterns. The main schemes of poetry are meter and rhyme. In schematic prose, words, phrases, and clauses are balanced antithetically or in parallel; see more under **Wit**, below.

**NOTE ON STYLE**

You’ll find it easier to understand and paraphrase a speech if you ascertain its style or manner of address. Most speeches can be assigned to one of three styles: the **high** style appropriate to the court, to serious thoughts or sentiments, and to historic deeds; the **plain** style suited to the country, used by uneducated persons to dress their commonplace sentiments in proverbs or to lend pungency to their gross observations; and the **mean** (i.e. middle) style associated with the city and with clever conversation (e.g. preciosity; see below under “wit”). Each style is used to persuade a specific audience. The high style aims to move high-minded listeners to action or sympathy. The middle style seeks to entertain by wit. The end of the plain style is to inform or edify, seemingly without rhetoric. (Courses in freshman composition usually are designed to develop a plain style that is suitable for expository writing. To write a critical paper on literature, however—for example, a paraphrase—you have to pay attention to the rhetoric and the wit that are found to greater or less degree in each of the styles.)

The chief mark of a high, poetic style is its metaphorical tropes; even the trope of irony heightens, rather than diminishes, the terror of a tragic event or the unforeseen consequences of an action. In contrast to a high poetic style with its uplifting metaphors, the patterned prose in a comedy like Much Ado subordinates its metaphors to the speakers’ wit. Shakespeare’s comic characters mostly speak in a witty, conversational style that can sink to a plain style (compare Dogberry and his Watchmen) or rise to a high style when the persons of superior rank abandon wit for serious poetry.

**Wit; antithesis; word-play.** A passionate utterance in any of the styles is apt to rely on metaphors that make us overlook the speaker’s rhetoric, whereas artful repartee (preciosity) usually draws attention to a character’s wit. In comedy, wit can show off the speaker’s cleverness in detecting similarities (similes). In tragedy, the usual sign of
elevated sentiments or heightened concentration is personification (explained above as a special kind of metaphor—metonymy—that depends on conventional association, rather than on similarity: e.g., associating an effect with its cause, as when we link a skull to death). Other marks of a witty style are the trope of irony (the irony—saying one thing while meaning another—can be mocking or grave) and the various schemes of patterned speech such as antithesis (words and phrases balanced against one another with the parallel members sometimes containing the same number of syllables). Common schemes of words are alliteration (words starting with the same letter), rhyme (lines ending with the same sound), anaphora (lines or clauses beginning with the same word or phrase), chiasmus (words or phrases placed in the sequence a–b : : b–a), and antistrophe (ending lines or clauses with the same word or phrase—the reverse of anaphora). Word-play consists in repeating a word in a different form or in a scheme to indicate that its meaning has changed. (A striking example is Othello’s word-play as he puts out the torch and goes to kill the sleeping Desdemona: “Put out the light, and then put out the light.” In this tragic trope, the hero uses wit to intensify his dire purpose, transforming the word-play into horrible mockery of his own act.)

GENERAL DIRECTIONS FOR PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing is a way to bring a speaker’s meaning into sharper focus. The speech—or dialogue, if more than one character is involved—comes at a particular moment in the play and it serves to advance the drama. (To understand its importance, try imagining the play with the speech and the scene left out.) Before you start to paraphrase a speech, note carefully its peculiar dramatic context. That has two elements: (1) the plot, which includes the characters’ immediate circumstances as well as their actions, and (2) their sentiments (thoughts and feelings). While paraphrasing this second element—the sentiments expressed—you must constantly keep your eye on the speaker’s circumstances, especially when dramatic irony is present.

Begin by reproducing the text. Quote the speech in its exact form (i.e., as poetry or as prose; refer to “Formatting,” above). You may find it helpful to put into italics any words and phrases whose significance you particularly want to emphasize. These might include figurative language (metaphors and personifications; see definitions above) as well as words that you find unusual or whose meanings have changed. If a word seems strange, look up its etymology; Shakespeare and his audience or readers were particularly attentive to the Latin roots of words. (NOTE: Check your syllabus for this URL for the online OED, an invaluable tool for paraphrasing: http://www.oed.com.ezp2.lib.umn.edu/)

Next, describe in a brief paragraph the speaker’s motives and sentiments. Assume your readers know the plot and only need to be reminded how the scene serves to further the play’s action; in some cases, you can best remind them by noting what scene precedes and what follows. Tell your reader precisely what are the chief thoughts and feelings (sentiments) that you mean to paraphrase. Try to bring out the speaker’s motives—keeping in mind that the speaker may have one purpose and the author another. Speaker and author both are using rhetoric: whom is the speaker trying to persuade to do, feel, or believe something? What response is the author trying to raise from the audience? Is the speaker mainly giving vent to emotions? Making an argument? Being ironical or witty (see “Note on Style,” above)? If the speech is a soliloquy or an aside, what is it meant to reveal about the speaker’s motives or sentiments?

In a separate paragraph, point out the speaker’s schemes and tropes (even if your quotation has already italicized them). Here is the place to note the speaker’s active wit (it’s really Shakespeare’s wit, of course) as s/he argues using logic or s/he expresses sentiments in metaphor. You can help prepare your reader for your paraphrase by ascertaining, as best you can, the metaphorical or logical connections that seem uppermost in the speaker’s mind.

Finally, paraphrase the speech by putting its Shakespearean meaning into modern English. Keep the first person (the “I”) of the speaker. Repeat nouns and verbs whose sense is plain (unambiguous; not involving word-play or metaphor),
but don’t shirk difficult words whose Shakespearean meaning requires a modern gloss. Where you’re unsure how to gloss a particular word or phrase, use a parenthesis to suggest an alternative meaning or to identify the metaphorical vehicle or the metonymy, and especially to note any personification (see above).

Try not to lose sight of the forest for the trees. A successful paraphrase, even if you strip away the parenthetical explanations, should always preserve the main import of a speech. Test the integrity of your paraphrase by reading it aloud alongside the Shakespearean original. Make sure that anything you’ve *added* is enclosed in parentheses and that the paraphrase minus its parentheses conveys Shakespeare’s meaning as clearly as an actor tries to do.

**SPECIMEN PARAPHRASES**

**Paraphrase from The Merchant of Venice** (Portia’s plea to Shylock)

The *quality of mercy* is not strained.  
It droppeth as the gentle *rain from heaven*  
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.  
’Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes  
The thronèd monarch better than his crown.  
His scepter shows the force of *temporal power*,  
The *attribute to awe and majesty*,  
Wherein doth sit the *dread and fear of kings*.  
But mercy is above this *sceptered sway*;  
It is *enthroned in the hearts* of kings;  
It is an *attribute to God* himself;  
And *earthly power* doth then show likest God’s  
When mercy *seasons justice*.  

*(MV 4.1.182–95)*

**Portia’s motives, sentiments, and argument**

Portia’s aim, in her character of Balthasar, is to persuade Shylock not to exercise the judgment that the law has awarded him against Antonio. When Shylock asks what law compels him to show mercy, Portia replies that mercy perfects the shortcomings of compulsory law by giving life, where the law can only restrain and kill. Her basic argument is that mercy or grace, being divine, carries an authority that trumps human or legal justice.

The Duke got nowhere when he appealed to Shylock’s mercy, and Portia very likely does not expect her plea to succeed. But she knows she can wrest the law to Shylock’s disadvantage, and she sets him up by reminding him that "In the course of justice, none of us / Should see salvation." Shylock is unmoved: "I crave the law" (197–204). In this way, Portia gets the Jew to sentence himself. (Shakespeare likes to present ironical scenes of self-judgment; see Hal’s use of the device in *H5 2.2*)

**Schemes and tropes**

To show that human law makes for imperfect justice (a just God sustains our world by law and mercy, not by law alone), Portia bases her argument on an antithesis between temporal reality (the world existing in time; the body, humans living under laws) and spiritual reality (the soul, God’s eternal Heaven). Several opposites in her speech reflect this antithesis: heaven above vs. earth below, giving vs. taking, God’s omnipotence vs. a king’s sovereignty, mercy that
preserves or "seasons" vs. justice that kills. Most striking is the antithesis or contrast between “sceptered sway” as an “attribute” of the sovereign and mercy as an “attribute” of God. Portia claims that divine mercy enters the judge (or the sovereign) and miraculously enables him to reconcile these antitheses. In addition to antithesis and blank verse (iambic pentameter), the speech’s only other scheme is the slight anaphora (“It is . . . ’Tis . . . It is . . . It is”) by means of which Portia methodically defines the several attributes of mercy.

The only active personifications other than “mercy” (which appears “enthroned”) are “dread and fear” (both “sit” in the king’s scepter). Mercy stands for grace, an important concept for Shakespeare’s audience. Grace is central to Christian teaching because it miraculously “blesses” or restores to life both “him that gives [mercy/grace] and him that takes” it. (By rejecting it, Shylock effectively short-circuits God’s intervention in the Venetian courtroom.) Portia conveys the transformative power of grace or mercy in her vivid trope of the king realizing his full, godlike potential only when mercy takes over his throne/heart. Other tropes are “season” (a word Shakespeare likes to use in this play; it means both a spice for a dish, and timeliness. At 5.1.107–8, Portia says "How many things by season season'd are / To their right praise and true perfection"). Finally—or to start with—note that “heaven” is a trope that equates Heaven with the skies (God and “heaven” are not actually up in the sky where the rain falls from; they are in the human heart).

**Paraphrase**

Mercy is too excellent a thing to be regulated by law. Mercy or grace is the free gift of Heaven, like a nourishing rain. Both giver and receiver partake in this blessed act of mercy (i.e., grace—unlike the law—makes everybody a winner). The greater someone’s authority, the more that authority is enhanced by mercy; a monarch is not truly crowned until he is graced with mercy. The king’s scepter symbolizes the power that he wields over our lives, making us fearful in the presence of majesty. But grace or mercy is a higher power still: by setting up its throne in his heart, it endows him with a divine attribute (the king is deposed, as it were, and replaced by God). A godlike sovereign (or Shylock with his sovereign power over Antonio) can preserve the (unhappy Merchant’s) life that is forfeit to the law.

**Paraphrase from Hamlet** (Hamlet envies Fortinbras)

How all occasions do inform against me 
And spur my dull revenge! What is man, 
If his chief good and market of his time 
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more. 
Sure he that made us with such large discourse, 
Looking before and after, gave us not 
That capability and godlike reason 
To just in us unused. Now, whether it be 
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple 
Of thinking too precisely on th’event—

**A thought** which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom 
And ever three parts coward—I know not 
Why I yet live to say “This thing’s to do,” 
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means 
To do’t. Examples gross as earth exhort me: 
Witness this army of such mass and charge, 
Led by a delicate and tender prince, 
Whose spirit by divine ambition puffed 
Makes mouths at the invisible event, 
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honor’s at the stake.  (Ham. 4.4.33–57)

Motives, sentiments, argument

Hamlet, having bungled yet another chance to avenge his father, has now tipped his hand to Claudius, who is determined to get rid of his menacing nephew. Hamlet is curiously passive here, not suspecting the King has planned his death. When he sees his young counterpart Fortinbras leading an army against “the Polack” (line 24), he contrasts Fortinbras’s confidence with his own hesitation. Hamlet takes this “gross example” of ambition as a sign urging him to action. (Ironically, Fortinbras’s ultimate goal is the throne of Denmark against which his father King Fortinbras staked—and lost—the throne of Norway, on the day Hamlet was born.) And while he seems to praise his rival’s ambition, Hamlet also looks skeptically at the “honor” Fortinbras achieves by risking so many lives for a piece of ground not worth an “eggshell.” [Beyond the lines paraphrased, Hamlet ends his speech (57–67) much the way he ended act 2: he vows to think only “bloody” thoughts henceforth. Yet when we next meet him in the graveyard (5.1) talking with Horatio, Hamlet seems to have forgotten about revenge. By that time, he’s more interested in corpses than ghosts, and he needs a fresh “occasion” or “example”—the shock of seeing Ophelia’s corpse—to rouse him from his melancholy distraction. Hamlet’s soliloquy at the end of 4.4, consequently, sounds like another surrender to the paralyzing, melancholy contemplation that he claims to deplore.]

Style, tropes and schemes

The high style of iambic pentameter, customary for serious plays (tragedies and histories), is modified by Hamlet’s unremitting intellectuality. As usual, Hamlet is making an argument: not to persuade another character (he speaks in soliloquy), but to convince himself “rightly to be great” and “greatly to find quarrel.” The chiastic scheme is typical of Hamlet, and so is his trick of splitting a phrase into two nouns or adjectives yoked by “and” (a scheme called hendiadys—literally, “one by means of two”), as in “good and market,” “capable and godlike,” “cause and will,” “strength and means,” “mass and charge,” “delicate and tender,” “mortal and unsure” (see the paraphrase). Along with his self-mocking irony (see above), Hamlet uses personification, always a mark of high style because it requires us (or the Elizabethan audience) to follow his lofty argument. His philosophical flights take in abstract “universals” such as ambition, death, honor, thought vs. action, etc. But Shakespeare never allows the philosophy to eclipse the poetry. In line 34, the key or thematic universal of the play—revenge—is turned metaphorically into a dull “beast” that needs spurring. Another universal, “reason,” is a divine gift; if we neglect to use it, it grows moldy. Finally, “ambition” has the divine power to swell the “spirit” and animate us to action; obviously ambition, with its practical goals, is the best antidote for Hamlet’s disease. He undermines his instinctive prudence (the ability to take an inspired risk) by too much forethought.

Paraphrase

How all these incidental circumstances (compare “examples,” below) teach me (in spite of my negligence) and provoke my lazy revenge (metaphor of spurring a slow horse; leads to “beast”)! What is man, if the only profit he gets from marketing his time (spending his lifetime in this world) is to feed and sleep? An animal (who lacks reason) can do that. Surely God, who gave us such vast, discursive powers of foresight and retrospect, did not intend us to let our godlike capacity of reason atrophy and grow moldy from disuse. (For Shakespeare, power—Latin virtus—is creative and
dynamic. That is, if you fail to use a power to produce effects, the power is taken away from you; you don’t have the option of keeping it in reserve, or of getting a rain check so you can use it later.)

Whether because of animal-like (unreasoning; animals lack rational souls) forgetfulness, or because of cowardly fastidiousness about the outcome—a preoccupation (NB: “thought” = activity of thinking) that breaks down into one part wisdom and three parts coward (some readers detected a metaphor of “quartering” a traitor while plucking out and burning his false heart)—I can’t explain why I’m still here excusing my inaction, since my will is motivated to do it and I have sufficient means (taking these phrases as hendiadys; see above). I’m exhorted to action (metaphor of preaching a sermon) by examples (the examples in a sermon served as persuasive “arguments”) as solid and weighty as the earth: take for instance this army of huge cost, led by a delicately-bred prince who, swollen in spirit (“puffed” hints at recklessness) by godlike ambition, makes faces at (scorns) the unknown outcome (the same “event” that the more cautious Hamlet ponders too “precisely”) and exposes the vulnerable lives of his men to whatever Fortune, Death, and Danger (three personifications, notice) dare to inflict on them, and all for something worth no more than an eggshell. True greatness is not a matter of waiting for a great cause to stir you; rather, you demonstrate greatness of spirit (magnanimity) by making an honorable quarrel out of a trivial cause.

[Hamlet’s paradoxical formulation of greatness implies that he’s skeptical of the battlefield honor sought by a Fortinbras or a Hotspur; yet in the rest of his speech (57–67, omitted here), Hamlet feels “shame” at seeing these men hazard their lives for a cause not nearly so weighty as his. Hamlet has proven himself capable of rash action; we just saw him murder Polonius (whom he mistook for Claudius). Even so, he blames his slowness to act on his melancholy inclination to think ahead. Let’s define “prudence” as the ability to act with foresight; then the question arises, Which of these rival princes shows greater prudence? The play’s final act gives us an answer.]

**Paraphrase from 1 Henry IV** (Falstaff’s playing dead)

Embowed? If thou **embowel** me today, I’ll give you leave to **powder** me and eat me too tomorrow. ’Sblood, ’twas time to **counterfeit**, or that hot **termagant** Scot had paid me, **scot and lot too**. Counterfeit? I lie, I am no **counterfeit**. To die is to be a **counterfeit**, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man. But to **counterfeit dying**, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect **image** of life indeed. The **better part** of valor is **discretion**, in the which better part I have saved my life. **Zounds**, I am afraid of this **gunpowder** Percy, though he be dead. How if he should counterfeit too and rise? By my faith, I am afraid he would prove the better counterfeit. *(IH4 4.110–22)*

**Falstaff’s circumstances, argument, and sentiments**

Hal has just killed Hotspur and taken his leave of Falstaff, whom he sees lying dead nearby (“Could not all this flesh / Keep in a little life?”). Saying he’ll have Falstaff’s corpse disemboweled for embalming, Hal leaves the stage. After a pause so that the audience may take in this remarkable scene of the cowardly knight apparently lying dead next to the heroic Percy, Falstaff startles us by leaping up with “all this flesh” perfectly intact. Although addressed to us, his ensuing soliloquy repeats his argument from the tavern scene (2.4) where Falstaff tried to persuade his companions that he had not run away out of cowardice but from a noble instinct.

The gist of his argument is a paradox: a man is never more alive or has his wits more about him than when he’s trying to avoid death. In the sentiments disclosed here, Falstaff at first sounds quite satisfied with his argument; but then his always-alert instinct of self-preservation reminds him that Percy, too, may be feigning death and might be really dangerous.

**Tropes and schemes**
Falstaff’s chief metaphors come from the hunting and dressing of a deer, and from Shakespeare’s usual formula of acting = imitating. He often refers to the actor as a shadow in the sense of a copy or “counterfeit.” The important nouns, valor and discretion, are abstract qualities or virtues but they are not really personified agents, as they might become were Falstaff to elaborate: “Percy’s Valor has killed him, whereas my Valor, restrained by Discretion, has kept me alive.” An active personification should be animated by some willful purpose.

Falstaff’s prose speech has no schemes except for antithesis (“today/tomorrow,” “dying/liveth,” “counterfeit/true image,” “valor/discretion”). It does, however, use other tropes besides metaphor: notably word-play (antanaclasis, where a word is repeated with different meanings). Besides punning on scot, Falstaff rings the changes on counterfeit as verb and noun.

**Paraphrase**

You think you’re going to have me emboweled? If you can manage the job of eviscerating me (taking out all my guts) in one day, you’re welcome to pickle my flesh for tomorrow’s meal. By Christ’s blood, it was time to play dead, or that furious devil, Douglas, would have paid me in full (Falstaff puns on paid meaning “punished” and “paid off the debt that I owe to God,” 5.1.126). Counterfeit? That’s not true, I am not just an actor playing a role. To die is to become a (waxen) image of a man, a mere corpse without life. But to keep myself alive by posing as a dead man—that’s not to counterfeit (fake it), that’s to portray life in its full vitality. (COMMENT: Being in danger of death makes you most fully alive. Who is more alive: a man enjoying a beer in front of his TV, or a woman racer in the Indy 500?) Intelligent caution is a truer form of courage (than mere foolhardiness; NOTE that “better part” does not mean larger part), by which courage I’ve saved my life. By God’s wounds, I’m afraid this Percy could still blow me up, dead as he seems. What if he should be playing dead and were to rise up, too? No doubt he’d prove the more vital of the pair. (If he rose from death to kill Sir John, Hotspur would prove himself much more fully alive than Falstaff, who would then really be dead. In terms of Falstaff’s paradoxical definition, Percy, having survived Hal’s sword after all, would be a “better counterfeit” than Falstaff.)

**Paraphrase from Much Ado about Nothing** (Beatrice makes Benedick prove that he loves her)

BEATRICE Princes and counties! Surely, a princely testimony, a goodly count, Count Comfect; a sweet gallant, surely! O, that I were a man for his sake! Or that I had any friend would be a man for my sake! But manhood is melted into curtsies, valor into compliment, and men are only turned into tongue, and trim ones too. He is now as valiant as Hercules that only tells a lie and swears it. I cannot be a man with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving.

BENEDICK Tarry, good Beatrice. By this hand, I love thee.

BEATRICE Use it for my love some other way than swearing by it.

BENEDICK Think you in your soul the Count Claudio hath wronged Hero?

BEATRICE Yea, as sure as I have a thought or a soul.

BENEDICK Enough, I am engaged. I will challenge him. I will kiss your hand, and so I leave you. By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account. As you hear of me, so think of me. Go comfort your cousin. I must say she is dead. And so, farewell. [Exeunt separately.] (Ado 4.1.314–34)

**The characters’ motives and sentiments**

Beatrice and Benedick are left onstage alone, after Claudio’s deliberately cruel rejection of Hero at the altar. Realizing that she has “wept all this while” for Hero’s brutal shaming, Benedick tries to comfort her, saying “I do believe your fair cousin is wronged.” Beatrice immediately tests his sympathy by hinting that a man who “right[ed]” that wrong would deserve her love. Benedick takes the hint and “protest[s]” (i.e. formally declares) that he loves her; she says she
was about to protest her love for him; and he, eager to prove himself deserving, says “Come, bid me do anything for thee.” Her unexpectedly aggressive response—“Kill Claudio”—shocks Benedick’s sense of honor, and his instinctive “Ha! Not for the wide world” shows Beatrice that her professed lover would rather keep his friendship than merit her gratitude. “You kill me” instead of her slanderous “enemy,” she tells him, and she struggles to free herself from his grip as he detains her (255–98).

In the passage quoted above, Beatrice tightens her snare on Benedick (even though he is apparently holding her by the wrists). Earlier in the scene, when Beatrice insisted that “my cousin is belied!” (line 145), Benedick only admitted that he was “attired in wonder” (143) and noted that two of Hero’s three accusers “have the very bent of honor” (186). Now that he has professed his love, Beatrice tells Benedick that she won’t be his unless he shares her conviction that Hero is innocent and Claudio is a vile slanderer. He must be willing to “kill Claudio” on her behalf—to “eat his heart in the marketplace”; that is the punishment Claudio deserves for destroying Hero by “public accusation, [open] slander, unmitigated rancor” (303–6).

In 314–34, their final exchange that ends the scene, the lovers seem at last to understand each other’s sentiments and motives. “Sweet Hero . . . is wronged, she is slandered, she is undone,” says Beatrice yet again (311–12). In the paraphrased lines, she demonstrates to Benedick that men’s reputations, just like women’s, can be built up or destroyed by men who use plausible civilities and public avowals to mask their vile conduct. In effect, she’s tarring all men with the brush that—as we know—applies only to Don John.

**Tropes and schemes**

Their witty prose (preciosity) sets off Beatrice and Benedick’s dialogue from the blank verse portion of the scene that staged Hero’s brutal humiliation. Beatrice clings passionately and single-mindedly to the topic of Hero’s violated honor, forcing Benedick to acknowledge that his honor—his loyalty to Claudio and Don Pedro—must be sacrificed if he wants to win Beatrice’s love. She uses the tropes of word-play and meiosis (diminution) to disparage men’s honor, starting with titles like “prince” and “count” (both Claudio and Benedick are “Counts”). Honorable conduct was once the hallmark of noblemen from the court (whence the words “courtesy” and “courtship”), but now valor and manhood are replaced by smooth words and mannerisms that “melt” like a piece of candy. In addition to these tropes, Beatrice makes deft use of schemes including antithesis (“man with wishing/woman with grieving”), antithrope (“man for his sake . . . man for my sake”), anaphora (“into . . . into . . . into”), and alliteration (words with initial c’s, m’s, r’s).

**Paraphrase**

BEATRICE These princes (Don John, Don Pedro) and counts (Claudio; but Benedick too, if he condones his friend’s vile behavior) bear princely witness and tell honest stories (and report likely charges)! Count Candy’s (Claudio’s) chivalry is mere gallantry (a truly valiant man would put him to shame). O that I were a man so that I might chastise him! Or that I had a friend (ami, the term for one’s courtly lover) who would perform that act of chivalry for me [a pretty strong hint, on which Benedick will actually proceed]. But I ask too much; manhood and true valor are melted (like candy*; see below) into blandishments and the mere affectation of chivalry (paraphrasing her word “curtsies; see my remark above on the courtly basis of chivalry). Men have given up chivalric deeds for elegant talk, and can win the reputation of a Hercules just by telling a lie and backing it up with an oath. But I can’t wish a real man into existence, so I’ll die as a woman lamenting the death of chivalry (or my lack of a chivalric servant).

BENEDICK Don’t go, Beatrice (or “stop grieving”—see above, line 257). I swear by this hand (of mine) I love thee.
BEATRICE Use thy hand to do me chivalric service, not to swear by.

BENEDICK Think you (note change from more intimate “thee” to indicate earnestness) in your soul that honorable Claudio has dishonored Hero?

BEATRICE Yea, as sure as I think or have a soul.

BENEDICK Your judgment teaches me my chivalric duty (to correct an injustice. The courtly lover makes his mistress the arbiter of his honor). I will call him out for his vile action. I take my (chivalric) leave of you. By this hand (hers, which he kisses), I will make Claudio pay dearly for what he has done. You’ll hear no more talk from me—only my deeds reported by others. Form your opinion (or “base your love”) of me on that. Go, comfort your cousin; I must keep up the pretense that Hero is dead. And so, farewell (they leave the stage by different doors—see the S.D.—to signal the painful separation of courtly lovers, as he undertakes her chivalric behest).

*For other associations of candy (“Comfect”) with melting, see Ham 3.2.59; Ant 4.12.22; and Tmp 2.1.281–82.
FINDING AN ARGUMENT

Title

Your title should do more than announce your subject. In a short paper like this, the title has to define your subject by limiting it. A title such as “Beatrice: A Witty Heroine” doesn’t tell your reader what is individual about your approach. “Beatrice: A Witty Shrew” is much more distinctive because it suggests an interesting argument. You might try using a device favored by Shakespeare scholars and adapt a quotation to your title: “Beatrice as ‘Lady Disdain.’” Notice how by quoting a phrase from the play or the poem, you can borrow an “argument” or implied thesis, either from one of the characters (see Ado 1.1.108) or from the author.

Quotation-derived titles can work for non-dramatic topics as well. A paper on Milton could be titled “Revolt and Disobedience” (see PL 9.7–8). If you’re writing about biblical literature, you can choose from a trove of well-known phrases to signal your topic and argument: “Passing the Love of Women” (2 Sam. 1:26)

Thesis statement

A thesis statement may seem artificial or mechanical, but it is indispensable for a brief essay—even if it’s the last thing you actually write. Some writers begin with a thesis; others like to state it at the end of the first paragraph or at the start of the second. Depending on how the opening paragraph is written, its argument (thesis) may either be announced at the beginning or summarized at its end. Here’s a thesis that could serve in either position: “Beatrice is an independent woman who claims for herself the same libertine freedom that men like Benedick enjoy.” A paragraph introducing this thesis might explain that both lovers cling to an ideal of libertine (sexual) freedom, and the paper might go on to argue that they fear they will compromise their freedom by committing themselves to love—to say nothing of marriage.

Argument and evidence

When you frame a critical argument about a literary work, the evidence you cite to prove your argument comes from the work in question. Literary evidence consists almost entirely of convincing examples. These examples are your data; your task is to interpret these data and show how they are pertinent to your argument.

Each assertion you make about part of a play or a poem should come with a “for instance.” A distinguished paper will select examples from the author’s text that relate to its main theme, which the author usually indicates by the title. Find and quote language from elsewhere in the scene or the play (or in the poem) that supports your interpretation of the chosen passage or scene. Glossing or briefly paraphrasing a quoted passage is the readiest way to show how it pertains to your argument. (For clarity, you should render into idiomatic, American English any language containing unusual words or striking metaphors.)

Comparison and contrast

Every comparison implies a contrast. The more alike two things are, the more necessary it is to differentiate them; distinguishing between two identical wax apples is more challenging than pointing out how a real apple differs from its waxen imitation. Comparing character types from different plays is persuasive only if you can show that in spite of their similar circumstances, their actions and sentiments diverge. By the same token, to compare an author’s works from
different phases of his career—say, Milton’s great poems from the Restoration compared with his earlier works—you’ll need to identify characteristic ideas and themes that he modified to suit different purposes.

You’ll have a chance to revise your first draft, and in fact the best papers are produced by trial and error. In any case, try to help your reader by using your title to identify clearly the kind of theme—or, if you are comparing plays, the type of character—on which you will be grounding your arguments.