

MLA Citation and Documentation: Poetry

The humanities program at Lesley requires students to use Modern Language Association (MLA) citation format in their written work. Even an essay that does not consult secondary sources requires MLA citation and documentation of the literary work(s) under discussion. The guidelines below have been adapted from the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th ed.); students should consult the handbook for issues not covered here. CITATION refers to in-text reference, in parentheses, to the literary work you have quoted or referenced. Citation format is slightly different depending on the genre of the literary work.

Poetry is cited by author's last name (unless the author's name is already in your sentence) and by line number (not page number). Introduce quotations of three lines or less into your text, using slash marks to indicate line breaks. Make sure the quotation is integrated into your discussion in a grammatically correct way. Note that there is no punctuation within the parenthetical citation and that the sentence's punctuation comes after the citation.

The speaker addresses his father directly when he begins the poem by stating that "The whiskey on your breath / Could make a small boy dizzy" (Roethke 1-2). Even in these first lines, this poem communicates deep emotional ambivalence.

A quotation of four lines or more must be indented but still double spaced; it must reproduce the arrangement of the lines as accurately as possible. Note that the citation then occurs after the punctuation ending the quotation. As before, make sure that the quotation is integrated into your discussion in a grammatically correct way; note that the paragraph probably should not end with the quotation but should continue with discussion/development of your analytical point.

It is hard for the reader-- and perhaps for the speaker -- to decide how to feel about the father. The poem presents continuous contradiction in its depiction of the scene of the drunk father dancing with the little boy:

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself. (Roethke 5-8)

The word "romp" implies happiness and play, but the mother's disapproval and the disarray in the house indicate an undercurrent of anxiety and bitterness.

DOCUMENTATION refers to the list of works cited at the end of your paper (note that the Works Cited list should be on a separate page but is here on page 2 to save space and paper). In a paper with no secondary sources, the only item(s) on the works cited list are the literary text(s) under discussion. The documentation of the Roethke poem is formatted as a "work in an anthology," since it is in a textbook. For complete formatting information of a variety of types of documentation (web documents, stand-alone literary texts, etc.) students should consult the MLA handbook as well as the MLA Citation tab at the Sherrill Library research portal for students of language and literature: <http://research.lesley.edu/English>

Works Cited

Modern Language Association. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. New York:

Modern Language Association, 2009. Print.

Roethke, Theodore. "My Papa's Waltz." *The Compact Bedford Introduction to Literature*. 8th ed. Ed.

Michael Meyer. New York: Bedford/St Martin's, 2009. 609-610. Print.