Block Quotes, [sic], Ellipses

One problem that occurs when we are working with longer quotes is that our paragraphs grow to be huge on that page. In order to give the reader a visual break, we use block quotes to physically separate the quote from the rest of our text. Current MLA style states that prose text over four lines should be put in a block (poetry is handled differently and for now; do not worry about how to treat poetry).

MLA wants us to double-space and block quote and indent TEN spaces from the left margin, as shown in the following example:

Douglass is particularly blunt in his assessment of "Christian behavior in the south:

> I assert by most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere
>
> covering for the most horrid crimes,--a justifier of the most appalling
>
> beauty,--a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,--and a dark shelter, [sic]
>
> which is the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of
>
> slaveholders find the strongest protection. (53)

Douglass reveals here the passionate anger he feels at the perversion of the "love thy

neighbor" philosophy of Christianity.

Block quotes format rules:

1. *Notice how the text is indented ten spaces from the left margin (an effect you can get in most word processors by typing the text, highlighting it, and clicking on FORMAT, then PARAGRAPH, then INDENT two times) and that is double-spaced.*
2. *Block quotes are flush to the right margin.*

3. *Notice too that the block quote is technically part of the preceding sentence because of the use of the colon at the end of the introductory statement. The introductory statement preceding a block quote needs to always be followed by a colon before you set up the block quote.*
4. *We also do not indent the text after the end of the block quote; we are still in the same paragraph. Be aware that the parenthetical citation goes outside the final period.*

5. *Note that we do not use quotation marks in a block quote; the indentation tells the reader that it is a quote.*

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What is [sic] and when do I use it?

1. *sic is not an acronym. The term sic is a Latin word that means thus; so (not a mistake and is to be read as it stands).*
2. *Because we have to stay true to the quote as it appears in the source text, we must include the error in our quotation. Unfortunately, the readers may be unaware that the error was the original author's and assume that the error is ours. To avoid the quandary, we can simply add the bracketed phrase [sic]to indicate the error was in the source text.*

Example for using [sic]:

"The elefant [sic] was fascinating"(23).   The word "elefant" is a spelling error but this was the way the original writer presented it. By adding [sic], you tell your reader that this is not your error, but the original author's mistake.

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Ellipses

Sometimes we need to cut words, phrases, sentences or even whole paragraphs out of a quotation in order to present to the reader a concise quotation that illustrates the issue we want to discuss. We can make such cuts by using an ellipse, which is made from three period, with a space before and after each period (like this: " ... ").

Warning about using ellipses: Be careful because you can't cut out too many words and change the overall tone or meaning of a quote. In other words, do not use ellipses to manipulate a quote to say something it was not intended to mean.

Ellipses at the beginning and end of a quote are not necessary if we just want to use a phrase.
Example: By arguing that "beings of my own species had greater claims" (184), Frankenstein in essence displays a racist attitude.

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Adding Text to Quotes

Generally, adding text to quotes is forbidden. After all, if we could freely add text to a quote we could make a quote say anything we wanted. There are times, however, when it is acceptable to add a word or phrase to a quote, and when we do, we enclose the added material in brackets (like this: []).

When we add material to quotes, we do it to clarify references that do not make sense because we do not have the entire text in front of us or to make the quote fit into the grammatical structure of our sentences.

Example:

Original Text: "He was told he was at the barn" (59).
With Bracketed Text: "He [Hamilton] was told he [William Freeland] was at the barn" (59