

## 12 Using the Ellipsis

The **ellipsis** is three dots (full stops, or ellipsis points) in a row. It signifies that words or figures are missing. An ellipsis is used most frequently with quotations. It may come at the middle or end of a quotation, or it may be used at the beginning if the quotation begins mid-sentence and there is an appropriate lead-in.

So if we want to reduce a sentence like "The ceremony honoured twelve brilliant athletes from South Africa who were visiting the U.K." and leave out "from South Africa who were":

The ceremony honoured twelve brilliant athletes ... visiting the U.K.

If the omission comes after the end of a sentence, the ellipsis will be placed after the period, making a total of four dots.... Notice that there is no space between the last character of the sentence and the full stop.

The ellipsis can also be used to indicate a pause in the flow of a sentence, and is especially useful in quoted speech:

Kylie thought and thought ... and then thought some more.  
"I was wondering ..." Jason said, bemused.

Note the spacing of the ellipsis marks and the surrounding characters in the examples above. In mid-sentence, a space should appear between the first and last ellipsis marks and the surrounding letters. If a quotation is meant to trail off (as in Jason's bemused thought), leave a space between the last letter and the first ellipsis mark but do not include a full stop with the ellipsis marks.

If words are left off the *end* of a sentence, and that is all that is omitted, indicate the omission with ellipsis marks (preceded and followed by a space) and then indicate the end of the sentence with a full stop ... . If one or more sentences are omitted, end the sentence before the ellipsis with a full stop and then insert your ellipsis marks with a space on both sides. ... As in this example.

When words at the *beginning* of a quoted sentence are omitted, it is not necessary to use an ellipsis to indicate that words have been left out when that fragment can fit into the flow of your text. There is an exception: in a blockquoted fragment, use an ellipsis to indicate an omission:

According to Dylan and Baez, the distinction is unimportant ... once a new arrangement is published, traditional tunes are liable to copyright.

However, if the material quoted can be read as a complete sentence, simply capitalize the first word of the material and leave out the ellipsis marks:

This principle is described by Dylan and Baez:

Once a new arrangement is published, traditional tunes are liable to copyright.

When a lengthy quotation begins with a complete sentence and ends with a complete sentence, do not use an ellipsis at either the beginning or the end of the quotation unless, for some reason, it is important to emphasize that some language has been omitted.

The ellipsis should be treated as one unit and should not be broken at the end of a line. It will be useful to learn the code that will create an unbroken and unbreakable ellipsis for you on the word-processing program you are using.

The plural of *ellipsis* is *ellipses* (handy to remember when you're playing Scrabble), but the points themselves (the dots that make up the ellipsis) are called ellipsis points or ellipsis marks.