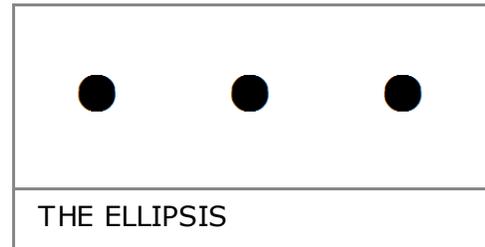


Ellipsis

Definition

From the Greek word for "omission" an ellipsis is a collection of marks that indicate an intentional omission of a word, a sentence, or even more. When used at the end of a sentence the mark then becomes an aposiopesis and usually had four periods instead of three. This means the sentence falls into silence. It is most commonly used in dialogue.



Function

In writing the ellipsis indicates an intentional omission. The mark is placed after the last word wanted, and before the next word wanted.

Consider this passage from *Wyrd Sisters* by Terry Pratchett:

"It was a rich and wonderful voice, with every diphthong gliding beautifully into place. It was a golden brown voice. If the Creator of the multiverse had a voice, it was a voice such as this. If it had a drawback, it was that it wasn't a voice you could use, for example, for ordering coal. Coal ordered by this voice would become diamonds.

"It apparently belonged to a large fat man who had been badly savaged by a mustache. Pink veins made a map of quite a large city on his cheeks; his nose could have hidden successfully in a bowl of strawberries. He wore a ragged jerkin and holey tights with an aplomb that nearly convinced you that his velvet-and-vermine robes were in the wash just at that moment. In one hand he held a towel, with which he had clearly been removing the make-up that still greased his features."

This passage is complete. If instead we wanted only a selection of this passage we would use the ellipsis to trim it down.

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Notice that the ellipsis in the passage above does come between two sentences. When this happens you still use only three dots. In this type of omission there would be no need for a four dot ellipsis because this is simply a quote. You would simply use quotation marks to indicate the end of the quote. The four dot ellipsis is rarely used in academic writing, usually you will see that mark in novels with dialogue.

Effect

The ellipsis is a symbol that indicates something is missing from the passage. In academic formal writing this is used almost exclusively when quoting from a text. The different citation forms have different rules about the ellipsis, for instance in MLA the ellipsis must be surrounded by brackets like this: [...]. This is because the author of the paper has inserted them, not the original author. As MLA is used for discussing literature it is important as many writers use ellipsis to indicate omission in their writing. When quoting the brackets lets a reader know what ellipsis came from the original author and what came from the author of the paper.

When used in a quote the ellipsis is commonly there to simply save space. The omitted section of the quote is removed because it is commonly expounding on an idea and by removing it the author can keep the quote short. Consider the example above. What I removed was simply more description of the character's voice. If my goal is to demonstrate both the voice and the appearance of the character the omission makes sense. The ellipsis can also be used to omit something from a quote that disproves your thesis. Because of this ellipsis should be used sparingly. A reader who encounters an ellipsis in a paper should consider looking the quote up, just in case the author of the paper is using it to omit something that he does not want you to read instead of shortening a quote.

The most common use of the ellipsis comes in dialogue. Usually there it represents a pause where a speaker was about to say something, then changed his mind. The four dot version also is common, there it simply means the speaker trailed off into silence.

History

The first noted Ellipsis shows up in Old Norse around 200 BC [1]. Through the interactions off the Romans and the Vikings the Ellipsis became common in the Romance languages, as well as the Germanic. Shakespeare was one of the first writers to heavily use the Ellipsis.

Bibliography

1. Ellipsis:<http://everything2.com/title/ellipsis21>, Feb. 2003. Accessed 16, Jan. 2012