

Elision

Definition of Elision

An elision is the removal of an unstressed syllable, consonants, or letters from a word or phrase, for the purpose of decreasing the number of letters or syllables when mixing words together. The missing letter is replaced by an [apostrophe](#). Generally, the middle or end letter or syllable is eliminated, or two words are blended together, and an apostrophe is inserted.

Difference Between Contraction and Elision

By merely looking at contraction and elision examples, one would think the two are the same. However, there is a slight difference between them.

Contraction is a more general term referring to the combination of two words to form a shorter word. For instance, *can't* is a contraction of “can” + “not,” which is a combination of two words. On the other hand, elision is a specific term. It is the omission of sounds, syllables, or phrases, and replacing them with an apostrophe. For instance, *ne'er* is an elided form of “never.” Similarly, *gonna* is an elision of the phrase “going to.”

Examples of Elision in Literature

Example #1: *Rape of Lock* (By Alexander Pope)

“What dire offence from **am'rous** causes springs,
What mighty contests rise from trivial things,
I sing—This [verse](#) to Caryl, Muse! is due:
This, **ev'n** Belinda may vouchsafe to view...

Say what strange motive, Goddess! could compel
A well-bred lord **t'assault** a gentle belle?

O say what stranger cause, yet **unexplor'd**,
Could make a gentle belle reject a lord...

Sol **thro'** white curtains shot a **tim'rous** ray,
And **op'd** those eyes that must eclipse the day;
Now lap-dogs give themselves the rousing shake..."

In this excerpt, Pope has elided several words, such as *amorous*, which is elided into "am'rous," even into "ev'n," *unexplored* into "unexplor'd," and similarly, *through* and *opened* are shortened to maintain regular [pentameter](#).

Example #2: *Dr. Faustus* (By Christopher Marlowe)

"Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin
To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess:
Having **commenc'd**, be a divine in show,
Sweet Analytics, 'tis thou hast **ravish'd** me!
Is, to dispute well, logic's chiefest end?
Then read no more; thou hast **attain'd** that end:
Be a physician, Faustus; heap up gold,
Why, Faustus, hast thou not attain'd that end?
Whereby whole cities have **escap'd** the plague,
And thousand desperate maladies been **cur'd**?
The god thou **serv'st** is thine own appetite,
Wherein is **fix'd** the love of Belzebub:
To him I'll build an altar and a church..."

Elision is employed perfectly in *Dr. Faustus*. In this excerpt, the author has eliminated unstressed syllables in order to give a smooth flow to the speech. The elided words are marked in bold.

Example #3: *Tam O'Shanter* (By Robert Burns)

"Whiles holding fast his guid blue bonnet,

Whiles **glow'ring** round wi prudent cares,
Lest bogles catch him unawares:
Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,
Where ghaists and houlets nightly cry.”

In this excerpt, the elided words include “o'er” and “**glow'ring**“. The vowel “e” is eliminated and replaced with an apostrophe. Through elision the [rhythm](#) and [meter](#) of the poem is maintained.

Example #4: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (By William Shakespeare)

“But with thy brawls thou hast **disturb'd** our sport
The ox hath therefore **stretch'd** his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth **attain'd** a beard;
And crows are fatted with the murrion flock;
The nine men's morris is **fill'd** up with mud...”

Here the word *disturbed* is elided into “disturb'd.” In a similar way, *stretched*, *attained*, and *filled* are elided.

Function of Elision

Usually used deliberately, elisions are often found in [prose](#) and poetry with the objective to continue a regular meter, or to create flow in [iambic pentameter](#). Since a specific meter is required, elision is employed to achieve the set number of syllables necessary to create flow in a piece. Several other languages use elision to cut down the number of words or to improve the flow of speech.