Quoting Verse: A Formatting Guide

Use forward slashes to indicate line breaks. Note that there is no space between the end of a line (including its final punctuation) and the forward slash, but that there is a space after the slash.

Example:
Chaucer’s narrator describes the Summoner as a repulsive man with a face marred by venereal disease: “A Somnour was ther with us that place/ That hadde a fir-reed cherubinnes face,/ For saucefleem he was, with yën narwe,/ And hoot he was, and lecherous as a sparwe” (lines 625-28).

For longer passages (six or more lines of poetry), use block quotes, and indent the lines of verse two tabs (typically to the 1” mark on the Ruler in MS Word; prose is indented just one tab, to the half-inch mark).

Example:
The narrator implies that the Pardoner, with his flowing hair and fashionable accessories, is an effeminate dandy:

The Pardoner hadde heer as yellow was wex,
But smoothe it heeng as dooth a strike of flex;
By ounces heenge his lokkes that he hadde,
And therwith he his shuldres overspradde,
But thin it lay, by colpons, oon by oon;
But hood for jolitee wered he noon,
For it was trussed up inhis walet (lines 677-83)

Note that usually citations for poetry indicate line numbers, rather than author and page numbers. Otherwise, introductions for quoted verse passages should convey the same information that is required for prose passages: speaker, context, and significance.

Example:
In “Delight in Disorder,” Herrick’s speaker uses erotically charged language to praise untidy clothing, which he intends as a metaphor for unconstrained art: “A cuff neglectful, and thereby/ Ribbons to flow confusedly;/ A winning wave, deserving note,/ In the tempestuous petticoat” (lines 7-10).

Plays written in verse also require indication of line breaks, but the internal citation need to refer only to the page(s) of the passage and not to the line numbers.

Example:
When Claudius unwittingly confirms that he is guilty of the king’s murder, Hamlet senses that the time has come to perform his dark mission: “’Tis now the very witching time of night,/ When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out/ Contagion to this world. Now I could drink hot blood/ And do such bitter business as the day/ Would quake to look on” (161).