



Success Center Tips for Integrating Quotations in Essays and Research Papers

Whether you are writing an informational essay or a research paper, you will sometimes want to include the exact words of a source, also called a direct quotation. Effective writers blend or integrate these quotations with their own writing so readers can see how the source information connects with the writer's thesis. Quotations should be used selectively *to support ideas that the writer has developed* in the paper. The content of the quotation (if shorter than four typed lines) should be placed in quotation marks, and the source should be clearly indicated, both in the paper's text and on a Works Cited or References page.

Tips regarding quotations:

- **Avoid** using too many quotations—overuse of quotations may indicate a lack of original ideas and lessen your credibility with readers.
- **Avoid** excessively long quotations—instructors expect students to include their own interpretation and analysis of a topic.
- **Avoid** dropping a quotation into your paper abruptly without an explanation or signal phrase to set it up—clumsy placement of quotations sacrifices purpose and coherence in a paper.
- **Avoid** omitting quotation marks (or block formatting) for direct quotations—failure to indicate the exact words of another is considered plagiarism.

The following guidelines offer tips for deciding when to use direct quotations rather than a paraphrase or summary of material. Always check to ensure that sources are reliable and relevant to your topic. Also, remember that you can adjust the length of direct quotations by using only the pertinent parts of a sentence or paragraph rather than the entire selection.

Use a direct quotation for:

- Primary source material (original documents, raw data)
- Literary sources that you are analyzing or interpreting
- Particularly eloquent or memorable phrasing
- An expert's opinion that supports your view
- Technical language that cannot be easily paraphrased
- Viewpoints that are distinctive or show a unique perspective

Readers expect a writer to smoothly incorporate quotations and clearly explain in his or her own words how quoted material is relevant. As the architect of the paper, you should control how information is presented and flows; don't let the sources take over and mask your voice. Use signal verbs (see the chart on the back) to cue readers when you are shifting from your voice to a source, and always identify authors and their credentials in signal phrases.

The first time you reference an author or authors of a source, include their full names in the signal phrase. Subsequently, use just the last name in your sentence or in-text citation. (In formal papers, do not refer to sources by first names only.) If the source doesn't have an author, refer to the title of the article or essay, enclosed in quotation marks. Place page numbers, if available, in parentheses at the end of the sentence: (52). Note that in MLA style, it is not appropriate to list a website URL within the paper.

To keep your writing interesting, avoid introducing a quotation the same way every time. For example, try placing the signal phrase in the middle of a sentence or at the end to vary your sentences. A variety of signal verbs are available for use when quoting material; however, be sure to choose an appropriate verb that indicates how you are relating the material within the context of your paper.

*Signal Verbs**

acknowledges	contends	lists	replies
adds	criticizes	maintains	reports
admits	declares	notes	responds
agrees	describes	objects	reveals
allows	disagrees	observes	shows
answers	discusses	offers	speculates
asserts	disputes	opposes	states
believes	emphasizes	outlines	suggests
charges	explains	points out	summarizes
claims	expresses	proposes	supports
concedes	finds	proves	thinks
concludes	identifies	refutes	urges
concur	implies	rejects	warns
confirms	interprets	remarks	writes

**Note that MLA style uses signal verbs in the present tense (Smith concludes . . .), but APA style generally prefers the past tense (Smith concluded . . .).*

Short quotation with a signal phrase:

Bruce Ballenger, a professor of English and author of composition textbooks, suggests that students “prune away unnecessary information from a quotation” for more effective writing (142).

Use ellipsis (. . .) to shorten quotations and show omission, and brackets [] to clarify quotations:

When using a quotation, “follow it with [your own] interpretation or analysis...to move your essay forward” (Ballenger 139). *(The words inserted in brackets show that I altered the original text. I’ve also omitted part of the quote to shorten it for my purpose. Avoid changing the writer’s meaning when shortening quotes.)*

Block format for long quotations: Long quotations (4 lines or more for MLA; 40 words or more for APA) are double-spaced and usually introduced with a complete sentence followed by a colon. Both MLA and APA style guidelines require the quote to be “blocked” by indenting it 5 spaces from the left margin, regardless of how it appears in the original source. Quotation marks are omitted, and the citation is placed after the final punctuation.

Ballenger offers this advice to students regarding the use of quotations in their writing:

The easiest thing to do with a quote you like is to use it all, to throw it all in your essay, kitchen sink and everything....Quotations from your sources can definitely be overused, especially when they seem dumped into the draft, untouched and unexamined, or used as a lazy substitute for paraphrase. But when it’s appropriate, bringing the voices of others into your own writing can bring the work to life and make readers feel as if there is a genuine conversation going on. (140-41)