



Quotations are an important part of writing papers. They add credibility to your writing and support for your arguments. However, quotations should not be the majority of the paper's content. They should be saved for key moments when you need an author's exact words to bring your point home to the reader. Sometimes all you need is a few words; other times you may need a paragraph.

Here are some rules for how and when to use quotations and how to integrate them into the body of your paper.

### Quoting Single Words

- A single word borrowed from the text can effectively uphold a claim. Take the following example:

In the first chapter, Sheila is characterized as inescapably obnoxious. The author writes that she “brays” at Mr. Martin and “barks” orders (77).

The quoted words give credit or prove the fact of the first statement.

### Quoting Phrases

- Quoted phrases should be integrated smoothly into the sentence structure:

Tia's mixture of vanity and insecurity becomes clear when she “craned her neck to glance into mirrors, or checked other people's faces to make sure her own was all right” (345).

The quoted phrase supports the initial observation of Tia's vanity and insecurity. Note that no comma is required to separate the writer's words from the quote.

### Quoting Whole Sentences

- Whole sentences borrowed from another writer require a reference or signal phrase (“s/he said/wrote”). Punctuate with comma(s):

The author of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* writes, “Quote only words, phrases, lines, and passages that are particularly interesting, vivid, unusual, or apt” (109).

- Punctuate with a colon if the quote is uninterrupted and placed after a complete sentence:

The *MLA* guidelines recommend that we keep quotations brief: “Overquotation can bore your readers and might lead them to conclude that you are neither an original thinker nor a skillful writer” (109).

- For variation or style, you may want to divide the quote with your own words.

“You may paraphrase the original and quote only fragments,” says Joseph Gibaldi, author of the *MLA Handbook*, making it easier to “integrate [quotes] into the text” (109).

## The Long Quote

- A long quote (more than four lines of text) is formatted to stand out on the page. The quoted words are double-space, indented one inch on the right side and NOT surrounded by quotation marks. If the sentence preceding the quote is complete, use a colon:

For man, unlike any other thing organic or inorganic in the universe, grows beyond his work, walks up the stairs of his concepts, emerges ahead of his accomplishments. This you may say of man—when theories change and crash, when schools, philosophies, when narrow dark alleys of thought, national, religious, economic, grow and disintegrate, man reaches, stumbles forward, painfully, mistakenly sometimes (155).

- If you are quoting more than one paragraph, indent each paragraph an additional quarter inch. For example:

There was a rush to go. And when the sun arose, the camping place was vacant, only a little litter left by the people. And the camping place was ready for a new world in a new night.

But along the highway the cars of the migrant people crawling out like bugs, and the narrow concrete miles stretched ahead (201).

## What Using Quotes Effectively Means

- Readers should be able to move from your words to the words you quote smoothly, without a “jolt.”
- Avoid dropping quotations into the text without warning; instead provide clear signal phrases, usually including the author’s name.
- When the signal phrase contains a verb, choose one that is appropriate to the context: is your source arguing a point, making an observation, reporting a fact, drawing a conclusion, refuting an argument, stating a belief?

## Common Signal Verbs and Phrases

“An author...

acknowledges	rejects	responds to	notes
comments on	agrees with	asserts	suggests
endorses	contends	denies	believes
reasons	implies	admits	disputes
adds	reports	confirms	observes
compares	argues	illustrates	thinks of
grants	declares	points out	claims
refutes	insists on	writes on	emphasizes

...an idea.”

### **Resources used:**

“Using Quotes Effectively.” Foot Hill University. Feb. 2001 <http://www.foothill.fhda.edu/la/people/lane-attach/Usingquotes.pdf>  
Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. New York: The MLA of America, 2003. 109-111.