

Using Quotes



Quotations are an important part of writing research 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. In any case, every quote should be properly introduced, integrated into your sentence or paragraph, and analyzed.

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

Introducing Quotes

Readers should smoothly be able to move from your words to the words you quote, without a "jolt." Any sentence with an integrated quote should still be grammatically correct and complete. 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?

Here are some common signal verbs and phrases:

"An author...

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

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. Also, the period follows the text, instead of following the internal citation. If the sentence preceding the quote is complete, use a colon. Or, use a lead in with a comma. Note that you can use ellipses (...) to connect the most pertinent ideas from a paragraph, excluding those that are not relevant to your purpose.

Kester Svendsen is not convinced that Milton articulates a personal theory of astronomy in *Paradise Lost*. For him, Milton was a pamphleteer and a poet, not a scientist—not even, for all his tampering with physics, an amateur of science...The sum of Milton’s allusions cannot be established or even regarded as his private belief; cosmology was a vocabulary for him, a quarry of images, not a formal statement of scientific theory the way Christian Doctrine is a formal statement of theology. (43)

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. (Radcliffe 201)

Analyzing Quotes

Remember, you are using a pertinent quote to make a specific point, and you should never assume that the quote in itself suggests every detail of that point. You must extend or analyze your quotes argument:

Dr. Andy Miah, who supports the regulated use of gene therapies in sports, sees athletes’ imminent turn to genetic modification as “merely a continuation of the way sport works; it allows us to create more extraordinary performances” (Rudebeck 14). Miah’s approval of “extraordinary performances” as the goal of competition reflects our culture’s tendency to demand and reward new heights of athletic achievement. The problem is that achievement nowadays increasingly results from biological and high-tech intervention rather than strictly from hard work.

For more information, see: Hacker, Diana. *A Writer’s Reference*. 6th Ed. Boston: Bedford St. Martin’s, 2009.