

Using Quotations Effectively

Proceed with caution when using direct quotations. Inexperienced writers risk letting other authors' words, ideas, and claims overwhelm their own. Quotations should be used sparingly because they can interfere with the flow of ideas and make it seem like you do not have ideas of your own.

When is it appropriate to use direct quotations?

- When the specific wording of the literature is the subject of your analysis
- When the original wording is essential, such as a definition, a mandate/mission statement, or legal wording
- When the original language is so original, vivid, or expressive that paraphrasing it would detract from the power of the source
- When using the words of an expert or authority lends weight or credibility to an argument
- When changing the wording is impractical or unreasonable, such as lists or with discipline-specific terms

Common pitfalls of using direct quotations include the following:

- Using quotations out of context in ways that are confusing or that change the author's original meaning
- Inserting a quotation without introduction or comment
- Letting the quotation have the last word, which forces the reader to figure out the significance of the quotation
- Quoting information that should be paraphrased (in some disciplines, particularly the sciences, quoting is discouraged)

Solutions

Although it may be obvious to you how the quotation you have chosen supports your argument, it is a mistake to assume that the connection will be obvious to your reader. When including quotations, always introduce the quotation and transition clearly back to your own voice. There are several ways to do this:

1. Use a short signal phrase and comma to introduce the quotation.

In the words of noted psychologist Carl Jung, "..."

As cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead observed, "..."

During her acceptance speech, Grammy winner Tracy Chapman defended artists who "..."

Be sure to use **strong verbs** that signal how the quotation fits into your argument. *Says* and *states* are weak verbs. Telling your reader that an author *observes*, *argues*, or *suggests* situates that argument into your own analysis. Ask yourself whether the source material is making a claim, asserting a belief, stating a fact, etc. Next, choose an appropriate verb for the source material's purpose:

agrees	claims	declares	demonstrates	illustrates	refutes
asserts	comments	disagrees	emphasizes	implies	reports
advises	compares	disputes	explains	notes	responds

2. Introduce the quotation by explaining directly how it fits into your argument. To contrast two ideas, you might say:

Lewis offers us another view of Kinnell, praising him as a poet whose “later work became looser and more personal, with ample space for woodsy poems and flights of fancy” (29).

3. Leave the reader with a takeaway idea following the quotation. You could summarize the quotation, further explain its relevance, or both.

“...[direct quotation]...” In his emphasis on the personal nature of Kinnell’s work, Lewis draws an important connection between Kinnell and the confessional poets.

4. Quote short fragments rather than whole sentences. Suppose you were reporting on an interview with Jane Doe about her reaction to John F. Kennedy’s assassination:

Original quotation	“I couldn’t believe it. It was just unreal and so sad. It was just unbelievable. I had never experienced such denial. I don’t know why I felt so strongly. Perhaps it was because JFK was more to me than a president. He represented the hopes of young people everywhere.”
Abridged	Jane Doe grappled with grief and disbelief. She had viewed JFK not just as a national figurehead, but as a man who “represented the hopes of young people everywhere.”

5. Provide a citation for the quotation. All quotations, just like all paraphrases and summaries, require a formal citation. Place the parenthetical reference or footnote/endnote number after—not within—the closed quotation mark.

Roosevelt claimed, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself” (Roosevelt, Public Papers, 11).

Roosevelt claimed, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”¹

Material adapted from:

<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/quotations/>

<https://lethbridgecollege.ca/document-centre/forms/apa-style-guide/apa-guide>

<https://writing.umn.edu/sws/quickhelp/style/integratingquotes.html>

<https://stlcc.edu/student-support/academic-success-and-tutoring/writing-center/writing-resources/>

