

Using and Framing Direct Quotations

“The problem with quotes from the Internet is that no one can verify their authenticity.” – Abraham Lincoln

In some types of writing (like literary analysis) direct quotations are necessary to the purpose of the assignment; in other types of writing (like lab reports), they are considered unnecessarily distracting. Most of the writing you will do in college falls somewhere between these two extremes. When used correctly, direct quotations can lend authority, character, and variety to your writing.

WHEN TO USE DIRECT QUOTES

Direct quotes are probably the most obvious use of sources in a paper, but this does not mean that you should quote a source directly every time you want to make use of it. Often, a **paraphrase** or summary of the source will suffice (for more on this topic, see the “Paraphrasing” handout). In other situations, however, only a direct quotation will do. Consider using a direct quote when:

- The exact wording of an idea is important in some way.
- You plan to analyze specific words or phrases that the source uses.
- You want to emphasize a source’s particular viewpoint, opinion, or word choice.
- A passage is particularly memorable, clever, or effective.
- The source lends authoritative weight to your argument.
- Exact wording is needed for technical accuracy.

NOTE TAKING AND DIRECT QUOTES

It is good to keep the goals of your paper in mind as you read and take notes on your sources. For instance, if you know you will be expected to analyze a source’s language choices, you might highlight particularly striking words or phrases as you read. Don’t underestimate the helpfulness of taking notes on the text itself – many an hour has been wasted by students rifling back through the pages of a book, looking for a particular quote that they remember reading but failed to mark its location.

FRAMING

The quotation marks around direct quotes will clearly signal to your reader that the words contained within them belong to somebody else. However, if the authors or viewpoints of the source are at all important to your argument (for instance, if you are summarizing the academic conversation on a particular topic by quoting various scholars), it is usually helpful to frame the quotations in some way. Phrases such as “Miller claims,” “Burns believes,” or “Winchester found” give your reader context in which to understand your use of the quote. Notice, too, that the choice of verb in each of these phrases implies a different type of information (an argument, an opinion, and a fact, respectively).

CITING DIRECT QUOTATIONS IN-TEXT

The 6th edition of the APA Publications Manual requires that the citation of all direct quotations includes the author(s) (last name only), the year of publication, and the page or paragraph number. Where precisely this information is located in relation to the quote will depend on how the quote is framed.

If the quote stands on its own, then the full citation will be in parentheses after the closing quotation marks:

“In order to be effective change agents, students need to be trained in the specific skills necessary to understand and have an impact on curriculum transformation efforts” (Goldstein, 2009, p. 204).

This handout is adapted from resources originally created by Matthew Hedstrom of the University Writing Center at the University of Texas at Austin, with reference to the Publications Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition.

If a signal phrase is used, then the date should be in parentheses after the author's name, and only the page number should come after the quote:

Truer (2009) writes, "personally, I find the customs, practices, languages, and beliefs of my ancestors to be defining features of tradition and central to my identity" (p. 43).

SPECIAL FORMATTING

Most direct quotes that you use will be similar to the ones above. However, there are some cases in which special formatting rules come into play. The following are formatted according to APA style.

Block quotes: direct quotations that comprise more than 40 words should be formatted as block quotes. Block quotes are indented ½ inch from the regular text and do not use quotation marks. They are cited in the same way as regular quotes, except that the punctuation at the end of the quote comes before the parenthetical citation:

Stereotype and identity threats – these contingencies of identity – increase vigilance toward possible threat and bad consequences in the social environment, which diverts attention and mental capacity away from the task at hand, which worsens performance and general functioning, all of which further exacerbates anxiety, which further intensifies the vigilance for threat and the diversion of attention. (Steele 2010, p. 126)

Omitting information: in general, anything enclosed in quotation marks should be the exact words of the source. Sometimes, however, quotes may include information irrelevant to your point which you will wish to admit. In this case, an ellipsis (...) is used to indicate that words have been omitted. Remember that even without the omitted words, your quote should still make grammatical sense.

"As we have already said, the experience of writing a thesis is always useful for our future work... not so much for the chosen topic, but instead for the training that it demands, for the experience of rigor it provides, and for the skills required to organize the material" (Eco, 2015, pp. 32-33).

Adding information: it is sometimes necessary to add information (like the referent for unspecified pronouns) when using a quote. In this case, the additional information should be placed at the appropriate point in the quote and enclosed in brackets.

"It [the stereotype threat] induces rumination, which takes up mental capacity, distracting us from the task at hand" (Steele, 2010, p. 121).

Quotes within quotes: when a passage includes quotation marks in its original format, these should be changed to single quotes when the passage is quoted.

"One thing our collaboration taught us was to pay attention to the many ways we are not the 'same'" (Barron and Grimm, 2011, p. 312).

OTHER USES OF QUOTATION MARKS

Authors sometimes use quotation marks around words or phrases that are informal, ironic, or ungrammatical. These are known as **scare quotes** and should be used very sparingly. Unless the meaning is otherwise apparent from the context of the sentence, scare quotes are assumed to indicate irony (i.e. the opposite of what the word or phrase means in common usage). Overused, they can lead to confusion or even charges of plagiarism (if the word or phrase appears to have been taken from another source without proper attribution).