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# USING QUOTATIONS IN YOUR ESSAY

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Many students tend to overuse direct quotations in their essays. Direct quotations should be used only when paraphrasing would change the effectiveness or meaning of the author's words or when the author is a noted authority and the idea could not be better expressed or said more succinctly. Although quotations are common in essays in the humanities, they are used less extensively in the social sciences, and rarely in scientific writing.

**NOTE:** Remember that you must reference the use of someone else's ideas or findings as well as direct quotations. (For more information on how to reference, see the Fastfacts series on referencing styles.) The information in this Fastfacts handout is based on the MLA style, established by the Modern Language Association for referencing in the arts.

1. Introduce the quotation with your own words and integrate it grammatically into the sentence.

**NO:**

In this study, children were taught effective ways to deal with confrontations through role playing. "They demonstrated a significant increase in generating relevant solutions to interpersonal problems at both post-testing and follow-up testing."

**YES:**

In this study, children were taught effective ways to deal with confrontations through role playing: "They demonstrated a significant increase in generating relevant solutions to interpersonal problems at both post-testing and follow-up testing."

**BETTER YET:**

In this study, children who were taught effective ways to deal with confrontations through role playing "demonstrated a significant increase in generating relevant solutions to interpersonal problems at both post-testing and follow-up testing."

2. Reproduce the exact wording, punctuation, capitalization and spelling of the original, including errors. Supplementary information should be enclosed:

- in square brackets if within the quotation
- in parentheses if after the quotation.

- Insert the word [sic] in square brackets after an error in the original. e.g.,

He wrote, "I enjoy writing [sic], but find it difficult."

- If you want to underline or italicize for emphasis, write *my emphasis* or *emphasis added* in parentheses immediately following the closing quotation mark and before the end punctuation. e.g.,

Hamlet says, "To be or not to be" (*my emphasis*).

- Enclose in square brackets comments of your own added to clarify information in the original. e.g.,

He felt that "it [the essay] should be analytical rather than descriptive."

3. Use the proper punctuation to introduce quotations.

- Use commas after an explanatory tag such as he said, she explained, they wrote, etc. e.g.,

In his epilogue, Roberts stated, "I can't allow this abomination to continue."

**OR:**

"I can't," Roberts stated, "allow this abomination to continue."

- Use a colon when the words introducing the quotation form a complete sentence, when you are introducing a verse quotation, or when a longer quotation is set off from the text. e.g.,

She concluded with this statement: "I can't allow this abomination to continue."

- Use no punctuation when the quoted words form part of the sentence. e.g.,

She stated that she could not "allow this abomination to continue."

**OR:**

She told the readers that "this abomination" could not continue.

4. Use the proper punctuation to end quotations.

- Commas and periods are placed inside the final quotation mark.
- Semi-colons and colons are placed outside the final quotation mark.
- Question marks and exclamation points are placed inside only if the quotation is a question or an exclamation. e.g.,

She wrote, "What can I do to stop them?"

**OR:**

- Question marks and exclamation points are placed inside if both the quotation and the statement containing the quotation are questions or exclamations. e.g.,

Did she write, "What can I do to stop them?"

- Question marks and exclamation points are placed outside only if the statement is a question or exclamation. e.g.,

Did she write, "I can't allow this abomination to continue"?

- Do not use a period or comma **as well as** a question mark or exclamation point. e.g.,

**NO:**

"What can I do to stop them?", she wrote.

**YES:**

"What can I do to stop them?" she wrote.

**NO:**

She wrote, "What can I do to stop them?"

**YES:**

She wrote, "What can I do to stop them?"

5. Separate longer quotations from the text.

- Include within the text and use quotation marks around **four** lines or fewer of prose or **three** lines or fewer of poetry (use a slash (/) with a space on each side to signify the end of each line of poetry).
- Set off from the body of your text and omit quotation marks around **five** lines or more of prose or **four** lines or more of poetry. Indent one inch and use **double spacing**. These quotations are most often introduced by a colon. e.g.,

Smith explains the use of essay-writing terminology:

An assignment which asks you to do some library research to write on a topic may be called an essay, a paper, a research essay, a research paper, a term assignment, or a term paper. The terminology is not necessarily consistent: a term paper may tend to be a longer paper written in advanced courses, but not necessarily. You may be assigned a specific topic or asked to choose your own from subjects relevant to the course. (225)

**NOTE:** If the first line of the quotation is the first line of a paragraph, indent an additional quarter inch only if you are quoting several of the original paragraphs.

6. Use single quotation marks for a quotation within a quotation. e.g.,

Bogel states, "Campaign slogans, for example, are often built on this presumed correlation of form with meaning, as in the hopeful phrase 'Win with Willkie,' which sought to connect victory with the candidate by means of alliterative bonding" (168).

7. To omit something from the original, use ellipsis marks (periods preceded and followed by a space).

- To omit a line or more of a poem, use one full line of periods.
- To omit material within a sentence, use three periods.
- To omit material at the end of a sentence, use four periods (to include the sentence period).

**ORIGINAL:**

But of course these two "arguments" – that figurative language is necessary to define democracy, and that democracy permits such luxuries as figurative language – are really two faces of a single argument, an argument defining democracy, in part, as that form of government which recognizes the necessity of certain luxuries.

(Source: Bogel, Fredric V. "Understanding Prose." *Teaching Prose*. Ed. Frederic V. Bogel and Katherine K. Gottschalk. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1988. 172.)

- Use ellipsis when your words complete the sentence. e.g.,

Bogel also claims that "these two 'arguments' . . . are really two faces of a single argument" (172) in spite of evidence to the contrary.