

## Using and Framing Direct Quotations

When used properly, quotations can add authority, persuasion, and strength to your argument. However, quotations should only supplement your argument. Don't make an argument of only quotations – then it's not *your* argument. Getting the hang of using quotations correctly can be tricky. The guidelines below will help you. Remember that all quotations must be properly cited.

### When to use quotations

While it's important to support your argument with evidence from a variety of sources, and to properly acknowledge and cite those sources, not all evidence needs to be presented in the form of direct quotation. Often, you can convey information more efficiently and integrate it more smoothly into your own writing by **paraphrasing**, rather than using direct quotation (for more on paraphrasing, see the "Paraphrasing" handout). Whether you decide to paraphrase or quote a source, remember that you must give your source credit for any of their ideas or significant wording that you incorporate into your writing. **Attribution** (giving your source credit) is an important scholarly practice, and failing to attribute information can constitute academic dishonesty. Attribution styles (MLA, APA, etc.) and conventional uses of direct quotation vary by academic discipline. Consider using a direct quotation when:

- A passage is particularly effective, memorable, or well written. Conversely, avoid quoting passages that are mundane, ordinary, or state basic facts.
- Your analysis will focus on specific words or phrases in the passage.
- You want to emphasize a source's opinion, or show a range of opinion in each source's own words.
- A passage clarifies a difficult or contested claim, or does a particularly effective job explaining a complex concept.
- Exact wording is needed for technical accuracy.
- You are quoting an authority who will lend weight to your argument.

### Framing

When you use a direct quotation, you need to integrate it into the rest of the paragraph and to let your reader know whose words you are quoting. **Framing** a quotation supplies your reader with the context of the quotation and places the quotation into a longer sentence that fits in with the paragraph.

The first time you introduce a quotation and its source you should include some basic **contextual information**—an author, speaker, or institution responsible for the words. If you think the information will be helpful for your reader, you might also include the title of the article, chapter, or book, and/or the place of publication.

Introductions or frames can come before, after, or in the middle of the quotation. The clearest way to frame quotations is to use **speaker tags** or **verbs of attribution**. Don't worry too much about repeating the same verbs of attribution throughout your paper. Verbs like "says," and "claims," as well as phrases like "according to," are great ways to let your reader know that you are presenting someone else's words or argument. Different words can imply different attitudes on the part of both speaker and author towards a quotation. For more on how to select appropriate verbs of attribution, or for help finding a variety of verbs to use with quotations, you can consult the "Verbs of Attribution" handout.

Some examples include:

- Framing before the quotation:

Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation*, argues, “The history of the twentieth century was dominated by the struggle against totalitarian systems of state power. The twenty-first will no doubt be marked by a struggle to curtail excessive corporate power” (15).

- Framing after the quotation:

“Beware of all enterprises that require new clothes,” Henry David Thoreau warned (25).

- Framing in the middle of the quotation:

“This evidence is overwhelming at this point,” journalist and cookbook author Mark Bittman explains. “You eat more plants, you eat less other stuff, you live longer” (70).

In general, it’s best to avoid “floating” quotations in which you place one or more sentences of quoted material in a paragraph without integrating, framing, or introducing the quotation.

**Block quotes** are quotations of more than four lines. They should be used deliberately and only when omitting part of the quote would hurt its power. Consult the style guide for the specific citation style you are using for more guidelines on block quotations.

## Analyzing quotations

If a quotation is significant enough for you to include word-for-word (rather than summarizing or paraphrasing), then it’s important enough for you to explain why that quotation is significant. Each direct quotation should be followed by one or more sentences of analysis, explaining what’s interesting, significant, or helpful about the quotation. If the quotation is long, complex, or difficult to understand, it’s helpful to follow up with a brief summary of the quotation that explains why it’s helpful to your argument.

## Modifying quotations

In order to make direct quotations fit smoothly into your paragraph, you may want to tailor your language so that the quotation fits into the grammar of your sentence. To do this, you may need to modify the words you use to introduce a quotation, or to carefully modify the quotation itself.

### Ellipses

Sometimes, you may only need to use part of a lengthy quotation. **Ellipses** (three spaced periods . . .) indicate to your reader that you have removed part of the original quotation:

Mark Twain’s disdain for Jane Austen is well known. He declared in an 1898 letter, “I haven’t any right to criticise books, and I don’t do it except when I hate them. I often want to criticise Jane Austen. . . . Every time I read ‘Pride and Prejudice’ I want to dig her up and beat her over the skull with her own shin-bone.”

### Brackets

Sometimes you need to change the tense of a verb or clarify or change a pronoun or name. Use square brackets to indicate any changes you make to the original quotation:

According to John Smith, “They [puppies] are always more trouble than they’re worth.”

Be careful not to modify or excerpt a quotation to the extent that it differs dramatically from the original phrasing, or worse, becomes unrecognizable when compared to the original. Even if you’re only interested in a single word or phrase, make sure you provide enough context so that your reader can see the word or phrase’s role in the sentence or passage.