

# Using Quotes Effectively

**When quoting, remember I-R-E: Introduce, Reproduce, Explain**

## **Introduce:**

Often, writers “drop” quotations into their papers as if the words fell from the sky. These dropped quotations make it difficult for readers to distinguish between the writer’s ideas and the evidence the writer is using to support those ideas. In addition, readers need some context for a quotation – who said it, where she said it, why she said it, and/or how she said it.

To avoid “dropped” quotations:

- Provide a context for the quotation.
- Use a signal phrase\* to introduce the quotation.
- Vary your signal phrases, choosing a verb that makes your source’s position clear.

For example:

- As President Obama has noted frequently over the past two years...
- At the second debate, Republican candidate Mitt Romney defended his record by pointing out that...
- Television psychologist Dr. Phil offered the odd argument that...
- “...” claimed my sister when she arrived an hour late for dinner. “...”

## **Reproduce:**

Professors want to see your writing, not a long string of quotes. Quotations should support your argument, not replace it. Don’t depend on quotations to make your point; instead, use them to back up and develop your ideas. Be selective in choosing what to quote. If a passage does not fit one or

more of the criteria below, it is probably best to paraphrase the ideas in your own words.

### **Quote when:**

- The original language is so fresh, original, vivid, or expressive that paraphrasing it would detract from the power of the source
- The words of an expert or authority will lend weight or credibility to an argument
- The exact wording is necessary to convey complex scientific or technical facts accurately and completely
- You wish to let the contenders in a debate or controversy explain their positions in their own words
- The language of the source is itself the topic of your discussion

### **Explain**

Although brief quotations may stand alone without explanation, often you will need to help your reader understand why a quotation is important in the context of your argument.

- Say something relevant about the quoted passage
- Restate the context or meaning of the quotation in your own words
- Show us how you are using the quotation to support your argument

*\*See our handout on “Integrating Sources with Signal Phrases” for more on this topic.*

## **Avoiding “Dropped” Quotations**

### **Example of a “dropped” quotation:**

Many leaders would want to kill the enemy that destroyed their homes and terrorized their people.

“I risked my life often when I was young. Now I am old. But as a king of the people I shall pursue this fight for the glory of winning” (30). So he selfishly goes alone to fight the dragon.

**Example of a fully integrated quotation (Introduced, Reproduced, Explained):**

Beowulf vows to kill the enemy that destroyed his home and terrorized his people. Although he has recently killed the monster Grendel with his bare hands, the elderly warrior realizes he is no longer in his prime. As he contemplates fighting the dragon, Beowulf laments, “I risked my life often when I was young. Now I am old. But as a king of the people I shall pursue this fight for the glory of winning” (30). Here is where we clearly see Beowulf committing mistakes. His motives for fighting are tragically flawed. He does not wish to strike down the monster to ensure the safety of his kingdom and people; instead, he seeks fame, longing to recapture the glory of his youth. So he selfishly goes alone to fight the dragon.

**Here, the writer begins to introduce the quotation by putting it into context:**

Although he has recently killed the monster Grendel with his bare hands, the elderly warrior realizes he is no longer in his prime.

**The signal phrase identifies the speaker and INTRODUCES the quotation, providing even more context. The strong verb helps the writer begin to EXPLAIN the passage:**

As he contemplates fighting the dragon, Beowulf laments...

**The writer reproduces the quotation, carefully choosing only the lines he wishes to emphasize:**

“I risked my life often when I was young. Now I am old. But as a king of the people I shall pursue this fight for the glory of winning” (30).

**The writer explains the quotation, helping the reader see how it supports the paper’s thesis:**

Here is where we clearly see Beowulf committing mistakes. His motives for fighting are tragically flawed. He does not wish to strike down the monster to ensure the safety of his kingdom and people; instead, he seeks fame, longing to recapture the glory of his youth. So he selfishly goes alone to fight the dragon.

**Another example of a “dropped” quotation:**

Opinions about obesity have changed over the years. “Obesity was considered either a moral failing or evidence of underlying psycho-pathology.” But the development of weight-loss medications in the early 1990s showed that “obesity should be treated in the same manner as ar

other chronic disease  
through the long-term use of medication” (Yanovski & Yanovski, 2002, p. 592).

**Example of fully integrated quotations (Introduced, Reproduced, Explained):**

The widening scope of the obesity problem has prompted medical professionals to rethink old conceptions of the disorder and its causes. As researchers Yanovski and Yanovski (2002) have explained, obesity was once considered “either a moral failing or evidence of underlying psychopathology” (p. 592). But this view has shifted: Many medical professionals now consider obesity a biomedical rather than a moral condition, influenced by both genetic and environmental factors. Yanovski and Yanovski (2002) have further noted that the development of weight-loss medications in the early 1990s showed that “obesity should be treated in the same manner as any other chronic disease through the long-term use of medication” (p. 592).

**Here, the writer uses the quotation to support his argument rather than relying on the quotation to make the argument for him. The writer begins to introduce and explain the quotation by putting it into context:**

The widening scope of the obesity problem has prompted medical professionals to rethink old conceptions of the disorder and its causes.

**The signal phrase introduces the quotation, identifying who is being quoted and using an appropriate verb in the signal phrase:**

As researchers Yanovski and Yanovski (2002) have explained, obesity was once considered “either a moral failing or evidence of underlying psychopathology” (p. 592).

**The writer continues to explain the quotation by putting it into context and explaining its significance. This passage also sets up the next quotation:**

But this view has shifted: Many medical professionals now consider obesity a biomedical rather than a moral condition, influenced by both genetic and environmental factors.

**The signal phrase introduces the quotation, again naming the sources and using an appropriate verb:**

Yanovski and Yanovski (2002) have further noted that the development of weight-loss medications in the early 1990s showed that “obesity should be ti

in the same manner as any other chronic disease through the long-term use of medication” (p. 592).

Sample adapted from: “APA Research Paper (Murano).” Research and Documentation Online, 5th Edition. Hackerhandbooks.com. n.d. Web.

*(Note that the second example is in APA format. For help on formatting citations, see our handouts on APA and MLA.)*

Learn more about the "**Quote Sandwich**."

Learn more about "**Introducing Sources**."