

Using Quotations

Thanks to Edward Armstrong, Bill Notter, Anne Greenwood, and *The Bedford Handbook for Writers, 4th Edition*, by Diana Hacker

Why Quote?

Writers use quotations for one primary reason: to support their arguments. A reasonable argument makes well-supported and/or developed claims about a topic. Quotations can show readers that the claim has some basis in a source and can capture the distinctive language or phrasing of the source.

Quoting Guidelines

(1) Know your claim.

If you are unclear about the claim you want to make in the first place, then finding a quotation to support that point will be difficult.

(2) Don't expect the quotation alone to make the point.

Explain why you are using a quotation: how does it support your argument or illustrate your point? When writing about literature, it might be necessary to explain what the quotation means or to justify the way you interpret its meaning. *Do not just quote a chunk of text and expect readers to understand how it fits into the paper. Make sure they understand exactly why you are using the quotation.*

When trying to make sure that you have explained quotations, you might try adding a sentence after the quotation that rephrases the idea expressed in the quotation in your own words (paraphrasing it). You can begin with phrases such as "In other words" or "In this statement, Bass argues." This method is especially important if you are integrating a quotation that expresses one of the source's main points. In addition, try to refrain from ending a paragraph with a quotation, leaving it hanging there without any explanation.

(3) Integrate quotations within your own writing.

Smoothly integrate quotations with original writing so readers can move from your words to the words of a source without feeling a "jolt." Avoid dropping quotations into the text without warning; instead, provide clear signal phrases, usually by including the author's name, to prepare readers for the quotation.

Although the bald eagle is still listed as an endangered species, its ever-increasing population is very encouraging. According to ornithologist Jay Sheppard, "The bald eagle seems to have stabilized its population, at the very least, almost everywhere" (96).

To avoid monotony, vary signal phrases as in these examples:

In the words of author and activist Rick Bass, "My heart was wild and did not belong among people."

As Flora Davis **has noted**, "The turbulent, affluent, optimistic 1960s provided an unusually hospitable climate for feminism."

The Gardners, experts in archaeology, **point out** that “Colorado was the cradle of the Anasazi culture.”

“This action is in fact a call for a lawless world,” **claims** linguist Noam Chomsky.

Psychologist Sidney McMaynerberry **offers** an argument for his theory: “It’s all in your mind.”

Brady answers her critics by **asserting**, “I did not know that it was made of people.”

Using active verbs in the signal phrase lets you show how an author approaches a topic. Is your source arguing a point, making an observation, reporting facts, drawing a conclusion, refuting an argument, or stating a belief? Choosing an appropriate verb, such as one from the following list, can make the author’s stance clear.

acknowledges	comments	describes	maintains	reports
adds	compares	disputes	notes	responds
admits	concedes	emphasizes	observes	shows
agrees	confirms	endorses	points out	states
argues	contends	illustrates	reasons	suggests
asserts	declares	implies	refutes	summarizes
claims	denies	insists	rejects	writes

(4) **Choose quotations effectively.**

Choose words, phrases, sentences, stanzas, or paragraphs that support your argument and represent the source fairly and accurately. Quote only what is necessary to show that your claim is believable. Instead of quoting a complete sentence, practice integrating a phrase or part of a sentence from the source within your own sentence structure:

Brian Millsap claims that banning DDT in 1972 was “the major turning point” in the bald eagle’s comeback.

The ultrasonography machine takes approximately 250 views of each breast, step by step. Mary Spletter likens the process to “examining an entire loaf of bread, one slice at a time” (40).

In refusing to have the cat fixed, Judith was uncompromising. As the narrator says, Judith believed it would be “morally wrong” for her to neuter the cat “simply to suit her own convenience” (144).

MLA Quoting Conventions

(1) Ellipses—three periods with a space before each and a space after the last—are used when words are omitted from the middle of a quotation. If you omit an entire sentence, use four periods. Some instructors (such as myself) may want you to follow MLA guidelines and place brackets around ellipses [. . .] to show that the ellipses are yours and not part of the quoted material. **Beginning or ending a quotation with an ellipsis is not necessary; it is assumed that material is left out before and after what is quoted.**

According to John Ashbery, “The seasons are [. . .] bumping into other things, getting along somehow.”

**** For the purposes of this class (101 and 102), avoid using block quotations. As papers in this class are fairly short (2-10 pp.), they lack the space for lengthy passages of quotation. In addition, assignments for 101 and 102 do not require the incorporation and analysis of entire paragraphs, paragraph structure or sequence. Therefore, limit your use of quotations to the above methods by integrating them into your sentences.**