

Using Quotations (from The Writing Center at UNC)

WHEN SHOULD I QUOTE?

You should use quotations at strategically selected moments. Packing your paper with quotations will not necessarily strengthen your argument. The majority of your paper should still be your original ideas in your own words (after all, it's your paper!). And quotations are only one type of evidence: well-balanced papers may also make use of paraphrases, data, and statistics. The types of evidence you use will depend in part on the conventions of the discipline or audience for which you are writing. For example, papers analyzing literature may rely heavily on direct quotations of the text, while papers in history may have more paraphrasing, data, and statistics than quotations.

1. Use quotes when discussing specific arguments or ideas.

Sometimes, in order to have a clear, accurate discussion of the ideas of others, you need to quote those ideas word for word. Suppose you want to challenge the following statement made by John Doe, a well-known historian:

Example: "At the beginning of World War Two, almost all Americans assumed the war would end quickly."

If it is especially important that you formulate a counterargument to this claim, then you might wish to quote the part of the statement that you find questionable and establish a dialogue between yourself and John Doe:

Example: Historian John Doe has argued that in 1941 "almost all Americans assumed the war would end quickly" (Doe 223). Yet during the first six months of U.S. involvement, the wives and mothers of soldiers often noted in their diaries their fear that the war would drag on for years.

2. Use quotes to give added emphasis to a particularly authoritative source on your topic.

There will be times when you want to highlight the words of a particularly important and authoritative source on your topic. For example, suppose you were writing an essay about the differences between the lives of male and female slaves in the U.S. South. One of your most provocative sources is a narrative written by a former slave, Harriet Jacobs. It would then be appropriate to quote some of Jacobs's words:

Example: "Harriet Jacobs, a former slave from North Carolina, published an autobiographical slave narrative in 1861. She exposed the hardships of both male and female slaves but ultimately concluded that "slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women."

In this particular example, Jacobs is providing a crucial first-hand perspective on slavery. Thus, her words deserve more exposure than a paraphrase could provide.

3. Use quotes to spice up your writing.

In order to lend variety to your writing, you may wish to quote a source with particularly vivid language. All quotations, however, must closely relate to your topic and arguments. Do not insert a quotation solely for its literary merits.

Example: "Calvin Coolidge's tendency to fall asleep became legendary. As H. L. Mencken commented in the American Mercury in 1933, "Nero fiddled, but Coolidge only snored."

HOW DO I SET UP AND FOLLOW UP A QUOTATION?

Once you've carefully selected the quotations that you want to use, your next job is to weave those quotations into your text. The words that precede and follow a quotation are just as important as the quotation itself. You can think of each quote as the filling in a sandwich: it may be tasty on its own, but it's messy to eat without some bread on either side of it. Your words can serve as the "bread" that helps readers digest each quote easily. Below are four guidelines for setting up and following up quotations.

In illustrating these four steps, we'll use as our example, Franklin Roosevelt's famous quotation, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

1. Provide a context for each quotation.

Do not rely on quotations to tell your story for you. It is your responsibility to provide your reader with a context for the quotation. The context should set the basic scene for when, possibly where, and under what circumstances the quotation was spoken or written. So, in providing a context for our above example, you might write:

Example: When Franklin Roosevelt gave his inaugural speech on March 4, 1933, he addressed a nation weakened and demoralized by economic depression.

2. Attribute each quotation to its source.

Tell your reader who is speaking. Here is a good test: try reading your text aloud. Could your reader determine without looking at your paper where your quotations begin? If not, you need to attribute the quote more noticeably.

Avoid getting into the "he/she said" attribution rut! There are many other ways to attribute quotes besides this construction. Here are a few alternative verbs, usually followed by "that":

add	state	point out	declare	opine
remark	comment	predict	criticize	observe
exclaim	respond	argue	proclaim	think
announce	estimate	suggest	note	note
reply	write	propose	complain	

3. Explain the significance of the quotation.

Once you've inserted your quotation, along with its context and attribution, don't stop! Your reader still needs your assessment of why the quotation holds significance for your paper. Using our Roosevelt example, if you were writing a paper on the first one-hundred days of FDR's administration, you might follow the quotation by linking it to that topic:

Example: With that message of hope and confidence, the new president set the stage for his next one-hundred days in office and helped restore the faith of the American people in their government.

4. Provide a citation for the quotation.

All quotations, just like all paraphrases, require a formal citation. For more details about particular citation formats, see the NNHS Library Learning Commons website. In general, you should remember one rule of thumb: Place the parenthetical reference or footnote/endnote number after—not within—the closed quotation mark.

Examples:

Roosevelt declared, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself" (Roosevelt, Public Papers 11).

Roosevelt declared, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."¹

¹ Roosevelt, *Public Papers*, 11

HOW DO I COMBINE QUOTATION MARKS WITH OTHER PUNCTUATION MARKS?

It can be confusing when you start combining quotation marks with other punctuation marks. You should consult a style manual for complicated situations, but the following two rules apply to most cases:

- 1) Keep periods and commas within quotation marks. If the sentence would end on a period, and you are using a parenthetical citation, omit the period.**
- 2) Place all other punctuation marks (colons, semicolons, exclamation marks, question marks) outside the quotation marks, except when they were part of the original quotation.**

Example: The student wrote that the U. S. Civil War "finally ended around 1900!"
The coach yelled, "Run!"

- 3) Use an ellipse (...) to show when you have removed a piece of the quote.**
- 4) Use brackets [] if you need to insert a word to help the reader understand the quote or if you have to change verb tense or pronouns.**