

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.

What is a Direct Quotation?

A direct quotation is when you take another person's words and place them in your own document. These must always be placed inside quotation marks and given appropriate attribution (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc).

When should I quote?

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. Only use a direct quotation when one of these statements is true:

- The passage is particularly effective, memorable, or well written.
- Your analysis will focus on specific words or phrases in the passage.
- You want to emphasize the source's opinion, especially if the passage clarifies a difficult or contested claim.
- You are quoting an authority who will lend weight to your argument.

How should I introduce a direct quotation?

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 (and why they should care what that person has to say). The first time you introduce a quotation and its source you should include some basic contextual information in a **signal phrase or signal verb**. These signals can appear at the beginning, middle, or end of a direct quote. Different words can imply different attitudes on the part of both speaker and author towards a 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).

→ This signal phrase/verb convey a sense of trust in the author.

Journalist and cookbook author Mark Bittman flippantly hypothesizes, *"You eat more plants, you eat less other stuff, you live longer"* (70).

→ This signal phrase/verb convey doubt about the author's claims.

How do I format a direct quotation correctly?

First, determine whether or not the quote should be formatted as a “short quote” or a “block quote.” This varies depending on the citation style you are using. MLA style considers a quote that takes up more than four lines of your document to be a block quote. For Chicago, the length is two lines. For APA, the length for block quotes is more than 40 words.

Short Quotes:

- ❑ Incorporate the quote into your own grammatical structure using signal phrases.
- ❑ Place quotation marks (“”) around the quoted words.
- ❑ Add attribution using the appropriate citation style for your document (MLA, APA, etc.) Ask your professor for guidelines about which style to use.

Block Quotes:

- ❑ Make sure you need the entire quote before inserting a block quote into your document. Ask yourself if there are portions of the original that could be removed without interfering with the meaning of the quote.
- ❑ Place a colon at the end of the signal phrase or sentence preceding the quote.
- ❑ Check the appropriate style guide for the rules regarding indentation and spacing.

Can I change a quote? When and how?

Ellipses: Sometimes, you may only need to use part of a lengthy quotation. Ellipses 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:

*“He wanted to change the way people look at race relations.”
→ According to political pundits, “[Barack Obama] wanted to change the way people look at race relations (Collins 39).*

Shouldn’t the meaning of the quote be obvious to my reader?

Your reader has come to you to hear your argument and your explanation of the topic. Each direct quotation should be followed by one or more sentences of analysis, explaining what’s interesting, significant, or helpful about the quotation.