

Writing Guide: Quotes, Context, and Attribution

Using Direct Quotes in the Research Paper

Quotations are used to support or strengthen or prove a statement in a body paragraph. Only use quotes which “fit” the topic you are writing about. If the quote is not appropriate to the explanation and description of your thesis statement or a paragraph topic sentence, do not use it. Think of yourself as a lawyer arguing a case in court. You would provide only that evidence which would influence a jury or judge. In the same way, in your writing your quote is considered “evidence”. Don’t present it if it has nothing to do with the points you are trying to prove in your paper. Don’t use quotes simply because your teacher tells you to do so.

Use a **direct quote** when the author of a source has stated something in such a way that to paraphrase would be to lose or diminish or confuse the original meaning or intent. One might also use a direct quote when something is stated in a particularly interesting or effective way. When using a direct quote, be sure to reproduce exactly the original passage, including unusual spelling, grammar, and punctuation. If changes or an explanation are needed to clarify a term, use brackets [] to indicate the explanation. Examples below are single spaced for brevity’s sake

Example: When asked why he refused to report to the Army, Robert shouted “Because I’m a C.O. [conscientious objector] you fool!” (42).

Omissions of original text, or a break in the quote, would be indicated with an ellipsis (...).

Punctuation Note: The parenthetical citation for the direct quote comes after the end quotation marks but before the end punctuation, unless a specific punctuation mark (such as an exclamation mark or a question mark) is part of the quote. In that case, end your sentence with a period after the parenthetical citation.

Example: Dorothea Brooks responds to her sister, “What a wonderful little almanac you are, Celia!” (7).

For quotes of four lines or longer, use the block form. Offset the entire quote one inch (two tabs), but continue to double space. The text remains flush with the right margin. Unless there is dialogue in the block quote, do not use quote marks. If there is dialogue (someone speaking) in the quotation, set off the dialogue with single quote marks. You should still use a parenthetical citation followed by a period.

You may **paraphrase** (put the author’s words into your own words), however you must still give the author credit for the work in a parenthetical citation.

Integrating Sources within Paragraphs

If a prose quotation runs no more than four lines and requires no special emphasis, put it in quotation marks and incorporate it into the text.

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. The examples of quotations below are taken from To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee.

Punctuation Note:

A quotation that is integral to the sentence structure is generally preceded by no punctuation.

The courtroom drama unfolded as “Calpurnia was making her way up the middle aisle, walking straight toward Atticus” (Lee 206).

If a verb of saying (says, exclaims, writes) introduces the quote, the quote is preceded by a comma.

Harper Lee wrote, “Miss Maudie hated her house: time spent indoors was time wasted” (42).

If the quotation is formally introduced, it is preceded by a colon.

The children’s discomfort at being there was relieved as Zeebo, the garbage collector, welcomed them: “‘Mister Jem,’ he said, ‘we’re mighty glad to have you all here’” (Lee 119).

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 by telling who is speaking, when or where or under what circumstances the quotation was spoken or written. The context should answer the question: Why did this writer use this quotation at this place in his/her essay?

Rather than merely writing

Scout says “I never understood her preoccupation with heredity” (Lee 130),

it is preferable and more interesting to write:

When Scout is curious about Aunt Alexandra’s unusual quirks she wonders “I never understood her preoccupation with heredity” (Lee 130).

WHENEVER YOU TAKE WORDS DIRECTLY FROM ANOTHER SOURCE, YOU USE QUOTATIONS AND CITATIONS. A citation goes after the last quote mark. If a prose quotation runs no more than four lines and requires no special emphasis you incorporate it into the text you are writing. For more details about particular citation formats, see the English Department Writing Handbook, either the print version or online at www.lz95.org/lzhs/wcenter/handbook.pdf.

Example: Throughout the novel Atticus is portrayed as an example of kindness and compassion. In her essay Laurie Champion recounts the talk Atticus has with Jem: “...but remember that it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird...Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy’...Throughout the novel, mockingbirds symbolize innocent people” (Champion). Both Jem and Scout learn to apply compassion and kindness when making judgments.

ATTRIBUTE EACH QUOTATION TO ITS SOURCE. Even if you place an internal (parenthetical) citation after a quotation, e.g. (Lee 130) you must still **attribute** the quotation within the text.

What is attribution? Simply tell your reader who is speaking. A good rule of thumb is this: Try reading your text aloud. Could your reader determine without looking at your paper where your quotations begin? If not, your paper probably contains “hanging quotations” which leave your reader hanging because they lack attribution.

Avoid the attribution rut! There are many ways to attribute quotes besides the common “he/she said” construction. Here are a few alternative verbs:

acknowledges, adds, admits, agrees, announces, answers, argues, asserts, believes, claims, comments, compares, complains, confirms, contends, criticizes, declares, defines, denies, disputes, emphasizes, estimates, exclaims, expresses, explains, endorses, grants, illustrates, implies, insists, notes, observes, opines, opposes, perceives, points out, predicts, proclaims, proposes, questions, reasons, recounts, refutes, rejects, remarks, replies, reports, responds, retorts, sees, states, suggests, thinks, writes.

Rather than writing

Miss Maudie said “...Atticus Finch was the deadeest shot in Maycomb County in his time.” (Lee 98).

it is more interesting and descriptive to write:

When the children expressed surprise at how well Atticus handled a gun, Miss Maudie remarked on their father’s skill: “Forgot to tell you the other day that besides playing the Jew’s Harp, Atticus Finch was the deadeest shot in Maycomb County in his time” (Lee 98).