

Quotations in Academic Papers

By offering your reader quotations from other works, you can add authority to your essay by drawing on the wisdom of others. Such quotations are also essential to provide a detailed analysis of a literary work. But how are you supposed to cite your quotes and explain them to the reader? Let's find out here.

How to Analyze Quotations in Your Essays

Although the right quotations are full of wisdom, you shouldn't drop them in your papers at random. Rather, it's your job to explain their significance and how they tie into your argument. This task is particularly important when you're analyzing literature.

When quoting material, accomplish *at least* one of the tasks listed below—but not all of them. This list should help you when you come across something that seems important, but you're not sure how to work it into your paper.

Below each main point, you will find a few suggestions concerning how to pull it off. You shouldn't try to pull off all the mini-suggestions either, but they can help guide you if you're not sure what the best way to handle a quote is.

Put the quote in your paper and...

*** Paraphrase it.**

- Put it in simple terms that make it clear what it means.
- Use wording consistent with the rest of the paper when you paraphrase it.
- Use wording that will make it clear why it's relevant to your topic.
- For example, maybe you could reuse some of the key words already found in your thesis.
- This technique is particularly useful if you're quoting something difficult to understand, perhaps because it uses jargon or archaic language. Your reader will better understand what it's saying.

EXAMPLE:

In his analysis of the Nintendo Switch, Fenton argues that “the hardware dedicated to its graphical prowess will hinder it from sustaining consistently high frame rates and, in some cases, even high definition resolutions, like its other console peers are capable of” (64). Simply put, he believes that the Switch is not strong enough to support smooth animations and detailed images as well as other video game systems can.

*** Respond to it.**

- If some people may think your quotation and source are unreliable, then you need to explain why it's a compelling piece of evidence. Or to put it simply, respond to the quotation by *supporting and defending it*.
- On the other hand, if the quotation goes against your argument, then why do you disagree with it? State your counterargument. Remember that you don't need to respond to every single possible objection against your thinking, but you should respond to common arguments or ones from authoritative sources.
- Are there any caveats you should make regarding the quote? For instance, is it a bit exaggerated? Possibly a bit outdated? Based on a study with significant limitations?
- Is there anything you would add to the quotation?

EXAMPLE:

Dr. Pataki goes on to warn that, if global warming is left unhindered, “the human race will soon be reduced to nothing more than a select few breeding pairs in Antarctica” (143). Although such a drastic outcome could take many more decades to occur than she suggests in her use of *soon*, her point still stands that, someday, rising temperatures will make only the coolest environments suitable for human life.

* Explain it.

- Does the reader need to know more about the person who said the quotation in order to understand the full significance of it?
- Does the reader need to know more about the quotation’s context in order to understand the full significance of it? Time, situation, location, surrounding text, surrounding conversation, and more are parts of the context.
- Are there any confusing points in the quotation you need to make clear so that the reader knows what it means and why it’s relevant to your argument?
- Like paraphrasing, this technique is particularly useful if you’re quoting something difficult to understand, perhaps because it uses jargon or archaic language.
- Are there any subtle implications to the quotation that the reader might miss on their own? If so, elaborate on what those subtle implications are and why they’re significant.
- Is the quotation using a form of figurative language that helps reinforce its point?
- Is the quotation given in a tone that helps reinforce its point?

EXAMPLE:

After watching his girlfriend kiss the boy who has bullied him in the past, Ned sadly whispers, “Would you betray me with a kiss?” (McDowd 255). This sad utterance alludes to a biblical passage in which Judas, one of Jesus’ disciples, betrays his master by showing a group of accusers where Jesus is in the night by offering him a kiss. By comparing the betrayal of his friend to one of the most infamous betrayals in all of history, Ned’s dialogue reveals the extent of his pain and how incredulous he feels that his girlfriend would dare to kiss a terrible bully.

* Generalize from it.

- What situations could you apply the quotation to?
- If the quotation was given in a certain context that’s different from the context you’re exploring in your paper, then how can the quotation be considered relevant? For instance, if a British person commented on the economy in the 1850s and you’re writing about the American economy today, then how does the quotation present an overriding truth that applies to our times as well? You might explain that the quotation is a timeless truth or was uttered in a context similar to the one you’re exploring.
- If the quotation was given while explaining something different from your topic, then how could it apply to your topic as well? For instance, look at this quote from the Bible: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies” (*New International Version*, 1 Cor. 6.19-20). In context, the author was discussing sexual morality. But could you also use the quotation to defend the importance of living a healthy lifestyle? And if so, why?
- Does the quotation suggest that your topic has implications for people beyond the target audience? For example, if you quote a magazine article about how to be a loving wife, could it apply to husbands as well? To girlfriends? To anyone that wants to be a nice person?
- Does the quotation imply that your topic has significant implications for our lives? For research outside of your field? For many different subsections within your field?

- Make sure your generalization is not a stretch. You should make the connection between the quotation and your topic clear to the reader.

EXAMPLE:

I gave plenty of examples in the bullet points above. Don't get greedy.

*** Point out the significance of it.**

- Basically, why should anyone care about your quotation?

- What are the full implications of your quotation?

- Has this quotation been used to inspire others (for better or for worse)?

- Is this a famous quote, and if so, then in what situations do most people make a reference to it?

EXAMPLE:

American psychoanalyst Walter Langer once claimed, "People will believe a big lie sooner than a little one; and if you repeat it frequently enough people will sooner or later believe it." At first glance, this remark may sound as if it comes from one of those angry talking heads on television, a person who always complains about the state of the world. However, this observation stems from Langer's psychological analysis of Adolf Hitler, who is obviously one of the most notorious dictators in all of history. Hitler's astute awareness that the masses could be easily manipulated allowed him to rise to power, which serves as a stern warning for us today as we navigate our political climate.

No matter what, the quotation and your explanation of it should somehow help you reinforce your argument, thesis, or general message.

Verbs to Introduce Quotations

* Whenever you use a quotation in an academic paper, you're expected to attribute it to someone (or something). Basically, who said it? Although you could use the verb *says*, that's awfully dry and vague. Try something else. Here are a few examples:

"Many people stay away from the mansion because they think it's haunted," Professor E.

Gadd **said** in a recent interview with *Bogus* magazine (24). [Let's try that again...]

"Many people stay away from the mansion because they think it's haunted," Professor E.

Gadd **explained** in a recent interview with *Bogus* magazine (24).

While the thinker **acknowledges** that absolute truth can be difficult to find, he **insists** that it must be possible. "Some people claim there is no absolute truth," he **observes**. "However, to say that it is an absolute truth that there is no absolute truth is self-contradictory" (Miller 64).

* It may also be helpful or necessary to clarify who the target audience of the quotation was (or is).

In this pivotal scene, the meek Rima Kujou demonstrates that she has finally become more courageous by **shouting to the entire assembly**, "I think you're all a bunch of liars!" (Zetta 143).

"Do you honestly believe that it's dangerous to send your children out trick-or-treating?" the talk show host **asked the overprotective mother** on live TV. "Well, what if I told you there's never been a reported case of anyone poisoning trick-or-treat candy?" (Claudel 255).

* Verbs such as those above are not limited to direct quotations, however. You can also use them when an author is trying to get a point across, especially in fiction.

In this chapter, Dickens **illustrates** how winning money does not satisfy greed, but rather exacerbates it.

In this chapter, Dickens **implies** that winning money does not satisfy greed, but rather exacerbates it.

In this chapter, Dickens **reinforces** the theme that winning money does not satisfy greed, but rather exacerbates it.

In this chapter, Dickens **warns** the reader that winning money does not satisfy greed, but rather exacerbates it.

* Do not pick strong-sounding verbs willy-nilly. Think about them carefully and pick the one most pertinent to the current situation. For instance, in the sample sentences above, I'd go with *warns* if the author is making his point quite blatantly, but *implies* if he's being more subtle.

* When all else fails, *claims* and *declares* work well in many contexts, but there is often a more specific word you could use.

List of Quotation Verbs

In order to introduce or analyze a quote or passage, consider using one of the following verbs:

acknowledges	elucidates	praises
addresses	embodies	questions
adds	emphasizes	reaffirms
admits	encourages	reasons
advocates	endorses	recommends
agrees	exclaims	reflects on
argues	exemplifies	refutes
asserts	exhorts	reinforces
believes	explains	rejects
boasts	explores	reminds us
calls for	extols	renounces
characterizes	grants	reports
claims	highlights	responds
clarifies	illustrates	reveals
comments	implies	says (use <i>only</i> as a last resort)
compares	implores	states
complains	insists	suggests
confirms	justifies	supports
contends	laments	symbolizes
conveys	makes clear	thinks
declares	mentions	urges
demands	muses	verifies
denies	notes	warns
depicts	observes	writes
describes	pleads	
disavows	points out	according to X, “
dramatizes	portrays	in the words of X, “

(I would not recommend using the word *proves*; that is usually far too strong.)

Other Tips for Introducing and Using Quotations

* Typically, quotes can be introduced smoothly by using the word *that* right before them. In this case, do not set off the quotation with a comma or capitalize the first word (unless, of course, that first word is a name or something else usually capitalized in the middle of sentences).

- Vyse's father declares that "acting quickly and rushing are two completely different things."

A comma instead of *that* often works fine, though it might sound like an awkward pause in some situations.

- Vyse's father declares, "Acting quickly and rushing are two completely different things."

Use colons sparingly, and make sure that a full sentence precedes the colon.

- Vyse's father often reminds his son what he considers the most important lesson a commander can learn: "Acting quickly and rushing are two completely different things."

* Fiction writers do not "explain" their theme: they "convey," "illustrate," or "depict" it. Other verbs are possible, but avoid dry-sounding, scientific ones.

* When quoting verse (such as a poem), remember to use a slash (/) to indicate line breaks.

Capitalize the first letter of every line if that's how the poem is written. If you're omitting words, put the ellipsis on the side of the slash that has words being omitted.

- The familiar poem reads, "Roses are red, / Violets are blue."

* An ellipsis is a "dot dot dot" put in to show that part of a quotation has been removed. In formal writing, place a space between each dot. To ensure all the dots stay on the same line in your paper, use "non-breaking spaces." You can do this in Microsoft Word by hitting CTRL, SHIFT, and SPACE all at the same time.

* If you use a quotation with a grammatical or spelling error in it, place "[*sic*]" immediately after the error to show that you're quoting the material accurately, not just making mistakes yourself.

- "I believe Abraham Lincon [*sic*] was one of our greatest presidents," the senator wrote on his website.

* Always check multiple sources to make sure that your quote is accurate word-for-word and that it has been attributed to the correct person or source.

- For instance, it might be tempting to write about how Mahatma Gandhi told us, "Be the change you want to see in the world," but he never said that. Also, no author in the Bible claimed, "God helps those who helps themselves." That was Benjamin Franklin... but not really. He wasn't the first person to write the phrase in English: that honor goes to a politician named Algernon Sidney.

* Block quotes, ones that are longer than four lines, are flushed (lined up) on the left side as if tabbed out. Punctuation does not follow the citation at the end. Here's an example:

On his marvelous website, the author writes the following about block quotes:

Here I am typing an example of a block quote, which is one that is four lines or longer. You don't use quotation marks with them, but rather introduce them beforehand with a sentence

ending in a colon. They should be indented out on the left side. For once, you put the citation after the period in MLA format, which doesn't really make sense, but oh well. I would recommend using block quotes sparingly since they break your flow. Instead, try analyzing them a few lines at a time. (Miller 3)

He then notes that the rest of the paragraph after the block quote is not indented.

- You should also use the block quotation format if you quote three or more lines of verse (poetry).

* In academic papers, when you refer to the work of someone else, be sure to introduce who that person is the first time you mention them. For instance, are they a literary critic, a biologist, a thirteenth-century philosopher? Who they are and why they're important should be obvious. Use both their first and last name. Afterwards, you can refer to them only by last name. Also, you do not need to put their last name in the citation at the end of the sentence if it's clear you're citing their work.

- In her guide on raising llamas, breeder Castile Thornberry, current owner of the Almond Valley Llama Farm, which has been in operation since 1959, provides advice to those who want to raise some as pets. She explains that llamas "are social animals that need to be around many others of their kind to live happy lives" (19). Therefore, those in the market for llamas need to be prepared to own many different ones. "You will also need to a large amount of land to accommodate for the needs of large numbers," Thornberry continues (20).

Quotations are essential to academic and nonfiction writing. They reinforce your point by drawing on other reliable sources. When it comes to analyzing literature, quoting the material helps provide specific evidence for your claims. Quotations are much more powerful than vague summaries of other material.

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