Integrating Quotations

A convention of academic writing is that we join the collective conversation by incorporating into our writing the ideas and quotes of other writers and thinkers. Generally, when we converse with other writers on the page, we quote, summarize, or paraphrase. Each of these strategies has its own benefits and challenges. This handout focuses on direct quoting, and how to integrate quotes effectively into your own writing.

There are many reasons to quote, and many strategies for doing so. Let’s first consider why we might want to quote from other writers?

- It’s a convention of academic writing; it’s expected by academic audiences.
- The passage is particularly graceful or technical and we want to keep the integrity of the original language by not summarizing or paraphrasing.
- The passage relates to our argument and lends itself to further discussion. Writers quote passages they agree with as well as passages they take issue with or want to build on.
- To establish context and relevance; our ideas do not exist in a void, but relate to a whole bunch of thinking already being done.

Because quoting is an academic convention, there are as many rules about it, and preferences for it, as there are academics. It may seem overwhelming at first, but it does get easier with practice. The more you read and notice how others use quotes, the more strategies you’ll have to do it yourself.

Some things to keep in mind when quoting:

- A quotation should never stand alone and should always fit smoothly into your own text. Quotes need to be planted and grown into the fabric of the text—that’s what it means to integrate, to weave two pieces together, so the reader can barely see the seams and can’t imagine one without the other.
- Essays and paragraphs should not begin with a quote. Since quotes need to be integrated into the fabric of the essay, that fabric of the essay needs to exist before the quote appears. The words integrate and integral share the same root—when we integrate something, we make it integral to the structure of the original.
- Choose your quotes carefully. I’ve seen students pick any random quote simply because a quote is required in their assignments. I’ve also seen students pick quotes they do not fully understand. Quotes should add to, enhance your writing, so choose wisely as to not clutter or confuse the writing with quotes.
- Quotes always come from somewhere written by someone—keep track of this information so you can properly cite the quote in MLA format.
- Quotes should fit into the grammar of your own sentence, which might require some fancy footwork. Always quote accurately. You have the internet for double checking quotes and tracking down their origins. Use it.
Here are the key aspects of quote integration. For every quote you incorporate into your writing, there will be:

1) an introductory/signal phrase
2) the author of the quote’s name
3) the quoted text
4) the explanation of why this quote belongs in your essay. Sometimes, this linking of the quote to your subject matter fits snugly within one sentences. But most of the time it will require a few sentences to develop the idea fully.
5) the citation information. In the humanities, we use MLA citation style to format our quotes. Sometimes the citation information is in the body of the sentence. Sometimes it is in the parenthesis at the end of the sentence.

Quoting is not an exact science, but here are some basic patterns and guidelines for making it work. Punctuation is very important in incorporating quotes, so please pay special attention to it in these examples.

**Simple and Straight Forward**

This is an easy rule to remember: if you use a complete sentence to introduce a quotation, you need a colon after the sentence. This strategy is formal in tone and should be used when the tone or example requires formality.

   Author and teacher Don Murray has famously proclaimed: “writing produces writing” (*Write to Learn* 7).

A colon is a formal piece of punctuation yet much of what we choose to quote doesn’t have the gravitas to support a colon. My grammar teacher in graduate school described the colon as a drum roll. If the piece of information appearing after the colon isn’t worthy of a drum roll, then you might want to write it less formally.

In this case, replacing the colon with the word “that” works.

   Author and teacher Don Murray is famous for noting that “writing produces writing” (*Write to Learn* 7).

Often, though not always, we use a comma to separate our own words from the words quoted. Syntax and sentence punctuation rules always apply when quoting.

   The local Chamber of Commerce has argued, “when the masses shop at Wal-Mart, communities lose” (Kent).

In this example, the name of the person who wrote the article is not named in the sentence and so must be included in the parenthetical citation. So, the person writing the article has the last name of Kent. This will correlate to an entry in your works cited page under the name “Kent,” which will also list the article title and the source of that article.
Here is another version of this quote where the parenthetical information is included in the body of the sentence.

Donny Kent, of the Kentucky Daily News, reports that the local Chamber of Commerce has argued, “when the masses shop at Wal-Mart, communities lose.”

Often our work does not fit into one neat sentence like in the above examples. In those examples, the quotes are not yet explained or integrated into the overall argument, yet knowing “why” the quote is in the essay is just as important as the “how” the quote is introduced and punctuated. Here is an example that needs a few sentences to establish itself as part of the essay.

Philosophers have long been interested in the subject of happiness. Albert Schweitzer’s assertion that “Happiness is nothing more than good health and a bad memory” is fascinating and ahead of its time. It hints to what science is just now learning about happiness, that much of it depends on how we think about our own experience and not the quality of that experience.

All of the above examples keep the quote intact and whole in the integration, but as you might guess, there are reasons to break a quote apart, or times when you only need smaller pieces of the original. Here is one example of how that works.

Original quote: “The veterans had forced me to think critically about the crucial transition into college, what it is that students need to meet the intellectual demands the freshman year makes of them.” From Mike Rose’s teaching memoir, Lives on the Boundary, page 165.

There are a couple of issues with this quote that need to be addressed during integration. One is that it was written in the first person. Since me, the writer, is not Mike Rose, I need to talk about him in the third person. The second issue is the word “freshman.” Rose was referring mostly to four-year university college freshman, yet the idea is perfectly applicable to other students. Twenty years later, it’s more common for scholars to use the term “first year students” in place of the word “freshman,” and I want to make that update as I integrate this into my own writing. Here is the new version of the above quote, integrated into my sentence.

In “Reclaiming the Classroom” Mike Rose details his early professional experiences, how teaching “the veterans had forced [him] to think critically about the crucial transition into college” many students struggle with and consider what he could do “to meet the intellectual demands [the first year of college] makes of them” (165).

**Using Brackets**

The above example requires the use of brackets to make the changes we made. Brackets are a form of punctuation we use in quoting to indicate any information that was changed from the original quote. In the above example, the first set of brackets
changes the pronoun from “me” to “him.” The second set is to make the specific noun “freshman year” the more general and inclusive “the first year of college.”

Why do we use brackets in quoting?

• Like in the previous examples, we use brackets to indicate we changed the original source. We cannot change the meaning of the original, though. All changes should be cosmetic in nature, like pronoun shifts, verb tense and noun case changes, subject clarifications, and other sentence grammar problems.
• To indicate we noticed the text in the original was in some way incorrect or dated. Occasionally we are quoting a text that includes misspelled words, grammar errors, or non-pc terms. In this case, we use brackets and the Latin word “sic”—meaning “thus it was written”—to indicate the text we have quoted appeared that way originally; the mistake is not our own. Example: “The student misspeled [sic] the word.” In this case, the word “misspeled” is misspelled, so the [sic] indicates it was misspelled in the original version and is not our own mistake.
• To clarify an important, missing bit of information. Pronouns always require an antecedent. Yet when we slice a quote out of its original context to incorporate it into our own, the antecedent is often lost. Example: “Their products were crucial to our success.” In this case who “their” and who “our” is is unclear. A rewrite of this might be, “[Skinny Cow’s] products were crucial to [my weight loss group’s] success.” (Unlikely, but you see how it works!)
• To clarify pronunciation or definition. Example: “He mispronounced mischievous [mis-chuh-vuhs].”

Using Ellipses

Ellipses are the three and four dots used to indicate text has been omitted from the original quote. Using ellipses at the beginning and end of quotes is going out of style. (Yes, quote integration is very much about what is considered “in” by academic writers. Their tastes and preferences change like fashion and music, and so the rules change too.) The only time we really use ellipses anymore is when we omit words from the middle of a longer quote. Sometimes the omission is all part of the same sentence. Sometimes the omission crosses sentence boundaries.

Original quote: "Things are not nearly so comprehensible and sayable as we are generally made to believe. Most experiences are unsayable; they come to fullness in a realm that words do not inhabit. And most unsayable of all are works of art, which—alongside our transient lives—mysteriously endure." Rainer Maria Rilke, from Letters to a Young Poet

Integration with ellipses: The urge to communicate, to explain, is a particular kind of futility. On the one hand, making a connection to another human being is quite miraculous and we all long to use our language to make connection. And yet, communication is sometimes extremely difficult and connection eludes us. As Rainer Maria Rilke points out, “things are not nearly so comprehensible and
sayable as we are generally made to believe...[and] come to fullness in a realm that words do not inhabit. And most unsayable of all are works of art, which—alongside our transient lives—mysteriously endure." The science of communication seeks to categorize and quantify, but true connection between people is often a matter of primordial mystery.

**Quoting Within a Quote**

A common problem: you are reading an article by one writer, who quotes another writer. You want to use the second quote, but how? When you’re doing advanced research, the rule is always to track down the original quote. Sometimes finding the original, even in the age of the internet, proves to be mostly impossible. More often though, it’s not required that we track down the original source and we can quote within a quote. There are multiple strategies for doing this.

Putting the description of the quoted within quote IN the exposition: Journalist Nancy Morgan interviewed nutritionist Joyce Donath for the *Sacramento Daily*, wherein Donath remarked, “our insistence on calories-in/calories-out is a dangerous misconception that needs to be corrected.”

Using the single quote mark within the double quote marks: Journalist Nancy Morgan interviewed nutritionist Joyce Donath for the *Sacramento Daily,* and describes “Donath’s enthusiasm for reeducating the public about nutrition. She’s clear ‘our insistence on calories-in/calories-out is a dangerous misconception that needs to be corrected.’”

In the above example, Donath is quoted in single quote marks within Morgan’s double quote marks. There are other strategies as well. Do an internet search to find more examples.

**Signal Phrases**

The best signal/introductory phrases are the ones already part of your vocabulary. Signal phrases include verbs to describe the nature of the quote you’re introducing. If you want a list of dozens and dozens of these, google “signal words and phrases.”

Common phrases include: argues, writes, suggests, claims, notes, explains, etc.

**Tricky Punctuation**

The general punctuation rules for MLA are:
- punctuation goes inside the quotation marks.
- sentences end in periods, question marks, or exclamation marks.
- the parenthetical citation IS part of the sentence, thus the sentence does not end until after the parenthesis.
• if the quoted text is asking a question, the question mark goes inside the quotation marks.
• if you, the writer, are asking a question, but the question mark isn’t part of the original quote, then the question mark goes outside of the end quotation mark. Why would he recommend I “brush my teeth before eating”? (Smith 72).
• what about dashes, colons, semicolons? If they were part of the original quote, they go inside the quote marks; if they are part of your sentences and not the quote, they go outside of the quotation marks.

Keep in mind as you research, write, and integrate:

• Document ideas and references, especially direct quotations. This means to keep track of (or relocate) the source of the words and ideas you’re using in your essay. Whenever possible, you want to find the first source (and not the he said, she said, they said version) of the quote.
• Always use complete sentences; an integrated quote is woven into the fabric of the essay and all of the sentences containing quotes are complete.
• An integrated source needs a parenthetical if there is author/article/page number information you did not include in the actual text of the sentence. A parenthetical always comes after the quote marks and before the period.
• Keep the original meaning of the quote; always seek to understand the context the quote came from and explain that context when necessary.
• Avoid ellipses (three dots) in the front of or after a quotation, even if words are missing. Save them for omissions in the middle of the quote.
• Do not use more than one period per sentence. You can use more than one set of quote marks per sentence though. (See previous example.)
• ALWAYS make the mixture of the author’s words and your words grammatically correct. If you need to insert a word of your own, or if you need to change a letter in order to make the sentence grammatically correct, use brackets.
• Never manipulate the quote in a way that changes the author’s original intention.
• Avoid quotes that are too long. Rule of thumb is to use the shortest possible quoted matter to still make your point. Unless you’re writing a particular kind of research essay, quotes should really not take up more than 10-15% of your essay.
• If you do use a quote that takes up more than four lines of text, use block quote format. Do an internet search on how to format a block quote in MLA.
• Never chose quotes you don’t understand or that are only tangentially related to your essay. Quotes should be so integral to your meaning making that if you remove the quotes, your essay won’t make sense.
• Never quote the dictionary or Wikipedia-type sites. Snore.
• You might think of quotes like expensive luxury items; you can’t buy them all, so spend your quote dollars wisely.
• The rules for quoting song lyrics, poems, and plays vary slightly. Be sure to look those up should you need them.
• There is more information on cherriporter.com/resources