

Using Direct Quotations

General Guidelines for Using Direct Quotations

- Use quotations sparingly and choose them wisely to accomplish purposes that would be difficult to achieve in other ways in your essay, such as:
 - Lending authority to your argument through an effective statement of an idea from a recognized leader in the field
 - Explaining a concept in a particularly succinct and eloquent manner
 - Making the author's style or choice of words a point of discussion in your essay – passages from a novel, for example
- Quote no more than is necessary to achieve your purpose.
- Make sure that any quotation you use is relevant to the argument that you are putting forward and that the connection will be clear to your reader
- Cite the source of a quoted passage in both the body of your essay and in your bibliography or reference list.
- Use the ellipsis mark (...) to show where you have deleted words in a quotation, and use square brackets ([]) to show where you have changed words (for clarity, brevity or to make the quotation fit with your essay's sentence structure).

William James, for example, wrote, "Were one asked to characterize ... religion in the broadest ... terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves [to that order]."

- Be sure that the way you use the quotation in your essay is consistent with the original author's meaning.

Incorporating Direct Quotations into Your Writing

There are two ways of incorporating the author of a quotation into a paragraph:

- To emphasize a quotation rather than its author, credit the author in a note following the quotation. For example, using APA style,
...people and platforms. As many commentators have noted, “The platforms of social media are built around weak ties” (Gladwell, 2010, p. 42). This fact is relevant to...
- To draw more attention to the author you are quoting, use the author’s name in the sentence you write. For example, using APA style,
...people and platforms. “The platforms of social media” as Gladwell (2010) and others have noted, “are built around weak ties” (p.42). This fact is relevant to....

Long quotations are treated differently from short ones.

- The definition of a “long” quotation differs from one style guide to another. The most common procedure is to indent the quoted material in a block without quotation marks. For example, APA style requires this procedure for quotes of more than forty words.

Steven Johnson (2005) has phrased the idea particularly well:

For decades, we’ve worked under the assumption that mass culture follows a path declining steadily toward lowest-common-denominator standards, presumably because the “masses” want dumb, simple pleasures and big media companies try to give the masses what they want. But...the exact opposite is happening: the culture is getting more cognitively demanding, not less. (p. 1)

While many others agree with him, this idea has yet to permeate the institutions that could potentially recreate the....

- Care is required when quoting a source that you have not read directly. For example, suppose you wish to quote a passage by John Dewey, but you read the passage in a book by Raymond Boisvert rather than in its original context. The appropriate procedure is to place Dewey’s words in quotation marks and to cite the source where you actually found them. For example, using APA style,

Equality is, of course, in need of a definition, and the one put forward by Dewey is “effective regard for whatever is distinctive and unique in each” (cited in Boisvert, 1998, p. 68). His rationale should....

Only the source in which you actually found the quoted passage (Boisvert, in the example) appears in your bibliography. The book or article in which the passage originally appeared (Dewey’s original material, in this case) should not be included.