



## #7) Integrating Quotations ~ Guidelines and MLA Style

Including quoted material can be an effective way to enliven your own writing. But beware. You must use quoted material sparingly. The overuse of quotations can drown out your voice and leave the reader wondering what happened to you—the writer. Remember, that's *your* name at the top of the paper! The purpose of this handout is to establish the appropriate occasions for using quoted material, to demonstrate the techniques for integrating quotations into your own text, and to identify some of the MLA guidelines for quotations.

**When to Quote** (from *Writing and Reading across the Curriculum*, 9th ed., Behrens and Rosen)

### 1) Memorable Language

Use quotations when the author of your source turns a phrase, sentence, or passage of particularly powerful, vivid, or memorable language.

### 2) Clear and Concise Language

Use quotations when the language in your source is so clear and economical that to attempt a paraphrase would be ineffective.

### 3) Authoritative Language

Use quotations when you want to lend the authority and credibility of experts or prominent figures to your writing. If you are writing to persuade, quotations from authoritative sources can be useful in supporting your argument.

Of course, one quotation might satisfy all three of the criteria above—a concise, powerful, and memorable remark from a prominent authority that helps to support your argument.

## How to Integrate Quotations

Integrate quotations into your own sentences. Don't drop quotations into your text without warning, and avoid standing quotations alone as sentences; instead, provide clear signal phrases to prepare readers for the quotation, and to alert readers to the identity of the speaker quoted:

Michael Crichton argues, "You, or someone you love, may die because of a gene patent that should never have been issued" (538).

A signal phrase includes the source's name (*Michael Crichton*) and a signal verb (*argues*).

You may want to include credentials to help establish the authority of your source (see #3 above):

Arnold S. Relman, professor emeritus of Medicine and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School, claims that the nation's health care system will need "major widespread changes" (557).

When your signal verb is followed by the word *that*, no comma is needed:

Novelist Michael Chabon maintains that “it is in the nature of a teenager to want to destroy” (314).

When your language introducing the quotation forms an independent clause, you may punctuate with the colon:

Twitchell contends that the many academics who portray American consumers as passive and brainwashed fail to acknowledge a fundamental aspect of our nature: “We like having stuff” (608).

Use active verbs in signal phrases to indicate the author’s tone and stance. Is your source arguing a point, making a neutral observation, reporting a fact, drawing a conclusion, refuting an argument, or stating a belief? Choose an appropriate signal verb to make clear the author's stance:

acknowledges	comments	describes	maintains	reports
adds	compares	disputes	notes	responds
admits	concedes	emphasizes	observes	shows
agrees	confirms	endorses	points out	states
argues	contends	illustrates	reasons	suggests
asserts	declares	implies	refutes	summarizes
claims	denies	insists	rejects	writes

## MLA Quotation Conventions

### 1) Quotations

For prose quotations of less than four lines, place quoted language in quotation marks and incorporate it into your text. Terminal punctuation follows the parenthetical citation:

But as the condemned man and his executioners approach the gallows, the prisoner steps slightly aside to avoid a puddle, and Orwell observes, “It is curious, but till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man” (47).

For variety, you can also divide the quotation by working the signal phrase into the middle of the sentence:

“It is curious,” Orwell notes, as the hanging party approaches the gallows and the prisoner steps slightly aside to avoid a puddle, “but till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man” (47).

Or, you can work key words or phrases of the original quotation into your sentence:

Orwell finds it “curious” that until his close involvement in the hanging of a Burmese prisoner he “had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man” (47).

For longer quotations (more than four lines of your own paper), set the passage off from your text by starting a new line indented one inch, and do not include quotation marks (parenthetical citation *follows* period):

Orwell describes the prisoner not as a dying man but as a man robustly alive:

All the organs of his body were working—bowels digesting food, skin renewing itself, nails growing, tissues forming—all toiling away in solemn foolery. His nails would still be growing when he stood on the drop, when he was falling through the air with a tenth of a second to live. His eyes saw the yellow gravel and the grey walls, and his brain still remembered, foresaw, reasoned—reasoned even about puddles. (47)

## 2) Ellipsis

When you wish to omit a portion of the original quoted language, you must use ellipsis points, a sequence of three spaced periods, to signal to the reader that you have edited the original. As the MLA Handbook notes, your omission should never present a quotation “that could cause a reader to misunderstand the sentence structure [or meaning] of the original source” (97).

Ellipsis points may come in the middle of a sentence:

In his essay “A Hanging,” Orwell laments the “unspeakable wrongness” of taking the life of another human. As the prisoner is marched to the gallows, Orwell reports, “All the organs of his body were working . . . all toiling away in solemn foolery” (47).

Or, if you have edited out the end of a longer sentence, place ellipsis points at the end, following your normal sentence-ending period:

In his essay “A Hanging,” Orwell laments the “unspeakable wrongness” of taking the life of another human. As the prisoner is marched to the gallows, Orwell reports, “His eyes saw the yellow gravel and the grey walls, and his brain still remembered, foresaw, reasoned. . . .”

If your ellipsis points come at the end and you have a parenthetical citation, place the period after parentheses:

In his essay “A Hanging,” Orwell laments the “unspeakable wrongness” of taking the life of another human. As the prisoner is marched to the gallows, Orwell reports, “His eyes saw the yellow gravel and the grey walls, and his brain still remembered, foresaw, reasoned . . .” (47).

**\*\*Note:** Some instructors prefer that you put *all* of your ellipses in brackets to distinguish yours from the author’s, but the MLA no longer requires that you use brackets in all cases. The MLA requires that you use brackets only when your quotation contains both an ellipsis of the author *and* an ellipsis of your own—a rare event. Take care to understand your instructor’s expectations.