Using Quotations

Quotations are a useful way to integrate sources into your essay. This tip sheet will answer the following questions about quotations and how to use them:

- What is a quotation?
- When should a quotation be used?
- How do you introduce quotations?
- How do you include quotations in an essay?
- Where do you include quotations in a paragraph?

What is a quotation?
A quotation, or quote, is someone else’s thoughts or ideas used word-for-word in an essay in order to provide evidence or support.

When should a quotation be used?
Quotations are only one of the ways that you can integrate sources into your essay. Here are the reasons you might choose to use a quotation instead of a paraphrasing or summarizing:

- The quotation is worthy of further analysis.
- The author’s words are particularly strong or memorable (the passage cannot be adequately expressed in another way).
- The quotation lends credibility to an argument by enlisting the support of an authority on the topic.

If the exact wording of an argument is not important, consider paraphrasing or summarizing the passage.

How do you introduce quotations?
When you include a quotation, it is helpful to integrate the quote into your sentence or paragraph by giving some context to the quotation. The following verbs and phrases are among those commonly used to introduce quotations:

- Writes
- Claims
- Says
- According to X,
- Explains
- Suggests
- Argues
- In X’s view,
- States
- Concludes
- Demonstrates
- In the words of X,
How do you include quotations in an essay?

All quotations should be credited to the source in both the essay and in a Works Cited page. Some well-known style guides include the MLA, the APA, and the Chicago Manual. Quotations are formatted differently depending on their length. The following examples are in the MLA style.

Short quotations

Normally, quotations should be integrated into the paragraph while maintaining the flow of the essay. Short quotations are identified by the use of quotation marks. Punctuation within a quotation should remain unchanged except for the last period in the sentence, which should instead appear after the citation.

Example

In reference to the time period of “A Tale of Two Cities,” Dickens writes, “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times” (11).

Long quotations

A quotation that is longer than three lines should be formatted as a block quotation. Long quotations should only be used when absolutely necessary as they may disrupt the flow of an essay and are sometimes viewed as an attempt by the writer to lengthen the essay. Note that quotation marks are not used for block quotations and that the citation sits outside of the ending period. Long quotations should be introduced with a colon after the lead in.

Example

“A Tale of Two Cities” begins with a passage that effectively uses anaphora and oxymora to illustrate the parallels and contradictions present in the story:

> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, . . . we had everything before us, we had nothing before us . . .– in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only. (Dickens 11)

Altering the source’s words

A quotation may have to be altered because it is too long, or its tense or grammatical structure is different from the rest of the essay. Missing text is indicated with an ellipsis . . . Other changes to the text should be within square brackets.

Example

Dickens describes the great divide between the rich and the poor before the French Revolution as, “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times, . . . we had everything before us, we had nothing before us” (11).
At the end of Shakespeare’s “The Tempest,” Prospero wishes to return to a real life in Milan, where “every third thought shall be [his] grave” (V.i.308).

**Where do you include quotations in a paragraph?**

A quotation should be followed by an analysis of its importance. It should provide support for, but never take the place of, the writer’s argument. As such, the writer should try to avoid ending a paragraph with a quotation.