

Five Suggestions for Using Quotes in Your Paper

1. Quote parts of a text that are so important you cannot express them in your own words.

You want to make sure that your words and the words of other authors are balanced in your writing. What you are saying and how you understand other texts is the most important part of your paper—you use quotes complement compliment *your* ideas, interpretation, and analysis.

If you can, summarize big ideas or things that are common knowledge in your own words.

Quote the part of a text that most clearly expresses an author's overall argument, provides an important idea in the text, or presents a definition that is relevant to your paper. If you find a quote that is more than a sentence or two, think carefully about whether you need the whole quote or can just use a portion of it and summarize the other portion of it.

2. Make sure quotes are integrated into your sentences and paragraphs.

- If you are quoting a phrase or a part of a sentence, weave your quote into a complete sentence. For example, if you were quoting the phrase, "secure the Blessings of Liberty" you would want to incorporate it into a complete sentence:

One of the main purposes of the U.S. Constitution is to "secure the Blessings of Liberty" for all people of the United States.

- If you are quoting a complete sentence, make sure you provide a context to this quote. Here are some examples:

In his victory speech, president-elect Barack Obama summed up the feeling of millions when he said, "Change has come to America."

OR

Towards the end of Alice Walker's short story, "Everyday Use," Dee reveals the significance of its title when talking about her sister, Maggie: "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use" (704).

3. Once you choose a quote, think carefully about how it fits into your paper. When explaining quotes in your paper, try to imagine that your reader is a fellow student who has a general idea of the work you are discussing but has not read it in its entirety. Here are some questions you should attempt to answer when interpreting a quote in an academic paper:

- Why did you choose this quote? What important information does it provide? How does it clearly reveal the writer's opinion on an issue or intention in writing this essay? Why is it particularly interesting?

- What background information do you need to supply to your reader in order for them to understand the context of the quote?
- Are there any terms that should be defined in order for someone who has not read the text before to understand what the quote is saying? Are there any words in the quote that are particularly important? Why are they important?
- If the quote is from a persuasive essay, how does this quote fit into the writer’s overall argument? Is this quote reflective of the overall argument or is it a minor or specific point?
- What is the writer trying to argue in this quote? How does this differ from what you are trying to argue?
- At what point does this quote appear in the text? Is the writer/speaker responding to someone or something?
- What literary devices or images are being used to make this quote effective and/or convincing?
- How does this quote contribute to your paper?

*Remember that if your quote takes up two lines of text, you should spend AT LEAST the same amount of space explaining the quote. Fully explaining the significance of a quote, though, can take a whole paragraph, so try to take some time to demonstrate to your reader why you included a specific quote.

4. Make a quote sandwich. When you include a quote in your essay, it is important to “sandwich” the quote in your own explanation. Before you insert the quote, introduce it, providing the context of the quote (i.e. who is saying the quote, where the quote comes from, and whether the quote comes from a particular part of the text). After you provide the quote, make sure you *analyze* it (i.e. explain why this quote is important and where it appears in the text). Here’s an example of a quote sandwich:

Introduce the quote:	In her short story, “Eleven,” Sandra Cisneros shows us how a child interprets age. At the end of the story, the child narrator states, “ I’m eleven today. I’m eleven, ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, and one, but I wish I was one hundred and two ” (27). The narrator says that while she is turning eleven years old, she also feels as if she is all the ages she has been before. She remembers all the experiences she has had at different ages, and she would rather be another age because she had a bad experience as an eleven year old.
Provide the quote:	
Explain the quote:	

5. **Be sure to use in-text citations when you quote.** When you quote in your essay, you always want to make sure that your reader has all the important information she needs about your quote—generally, the last name of the author and the page number where your reader can locate the quote. As she reads your essay, your reader will have general information about your source, and she can find out more information by looking at your Works Cited page at the end of your essay.

“The ideal reader, for a serious writer, is intelligent, capable of feeling, possessed of a moral sense, a lover of language, and very demanding” (Atwood 17).

In her essay, Margaret Atwood argues “the process of reading is part of the process of writing, the necessary completion without which writing can hardly be said to exist” (17).