

How to Quote

Quotation is one way to incorporate what you've read into your writing. If you use someone else's words in your assignment, it is crucial to mark them clearly as a quotation as well as reference the source, and also make quotation work effectively to support your argument.

To quote a text means to include a short section from a source, in its original form and wording, in your own work. As neither the idea nor the wording is your own, you need to signal to your reader that the words are a quotation and also include a reference to where the original can be found. If you don't signal this clearly, you run the risk of plagiarism, as without quotation marks, the reader will falsely assume that the words are yours. Because you are citing text from a specific page in the original, it is common practice to include the page number in the reference so the reader can find it directly without having to read the whole source.

Why use quotation?

Quotation is used when it would strengthen your argument for the reader to see the exact words of the original source, for example, in a definition. Quotation is used more commonly in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences than in Natural and Health Sciences. Some subjects analyse text as a form of data (such as Literature and History) and may quote from primary sources. Some subjects also use quotation more frequently to represent the views of other scholars which they then critique. Other subjects, particularly the Natural Sciences, use quotation very sparingly, preferring to use paraphrase.

Signalling a quotation

Quotation marks

To signal to your reader that a section of text is a quotation of someone else's work, you normally use quotation marks. These could be single ' or double " quotation marks, depending on the referencing or house style used in your subject. Single quotation marks are more common in UK academic writing, but double quotation marks, though used more in American English, are also acceptable depending on the referencing style.

Quoting longer sections

If you are quoting a longer section of text, for example, over 3 lines, your reader might lose track of the start and end of the quotation. In these cases, it is common practice to signal a quotation by leaving a blank line before and after it, single spacing it and indenting it either side, like this:

Quotations over two lines are often presented differently, relying on blank lines, single spacing and indentations rather than quotation marks, even in the middle of paragraphs.

Longer quotations of this sort are more common in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Integrating a quotation

Quotations need to be integrated with your own writing. They can't play an effective role in supporting your argument if they stand on their own as an isolated sentence, so include them in a sentence of your own to give them some context and purpose.

You might want to introduce the quotation with the scholar's name

Greenfield (2016, p.67) argues that 'critical thinking is a key skill in the workplace as well as university'.

Or you might simply include it as part of the sentence without drawing attention to the author:

Although 'critical thinking is a key skill in the workplace as well as university' (Greenfield, 2016, p.67), it is not often recognised that it may mean something a little different in that context.

You can make minor changes to the punctuation of the sentence to make it flow as part of yours. For example, if it starts with a capital letter because in the original it was the start of a sentence, then you can change it to lower case as it is now part of your sentence, which has its own capital letter.

Altering quotations

You might find that not all of the text you want to quote is actually relevant to your argument, or it is too wordy and you need to make it more concise, or it doesn't otherwise quite fit with the flow of your sentence. You can alter the quotation if you wish, if you make it clear what you have changed and do not alter its fundamental meaning.

- **Partial quotations:** you don't have to include the whole sentence if it's not all relevant, but can include a phrase from the original:

Criticality is not only academic, but is 'a key skill in the workplace' (Greenfield, 2016, p.67).

- **Omissions:** you can leave out words in the middle of a quotation if you indicate where they are missing with square brackets and three dots:

'Critical thinking is a key skill in [...] university' (Greenfield, 2016, p.67).

- **Changes:** if you need to change or add a word or otherwise alter the grammar to make the quote flow with your sentence, include it in square brackets. Such changes might for example be changing singular to plural, first person 'I' to third person, or changing the word 'it' to make it clearer what it refers to:

'It is commonly argued that higher order thinking skills are key skill[s] in the workplace as well as university'.

Using quotation effectively

Your lecturers want to see your learning and ideas in assignments. If used well, quotation can be a good way to support your points and demonstrate your ability to critique and analyse, as well as represent your sources in a transparent and fair way. However, if quotation is overused, it can mean that your own voice gets lost as other people's words dominate your writing, and your argument becomes a patchwork or collage of what other people have said.

- A quotation doesn't speak for itself – tell the reader how you want them to understand and interpret it. If you're quoting, always include a comment of your own about what is interesting, useful, relevant, persuasive or doubtful about it. The longer the quotation, the more you should have to say about it.
- A quotation doesn't speak for you – in your own assignment, your voice should be the most prominent. Try to resist speaking 'through' other authors and have confidence in your ideas and writing. Paraphrasing it in your own words may be better.

If you don't feel that a quotation is necessary, you can also paraphrase a source in your own words.

For more guidance on your learning, book a 1-2-1 tutorial with one of our Writing Development Centre tutors or visit our website for more activities and resources <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/resources-and-study-support/writing-development-centre/>

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