

Using Quotations in MLA

Accuracy

Writers must always accurately quote the source. If you decide to quote a source in order to support your thesis statement, reproduce the source word for word. Unless you use brackets or parentheses (see below), changes to the source's words, spelling, capitalization, or punctuation cannot be made. Additionally, introducing the quote with a signal phrase helps you smoothly incorporate the quotation ("Quotations" 75).

Signal Phrases

When you include summary or quotations, make sure that they are integrated smoothly into the argument, flow, and syntax of the paper without any logical or grammatical jolts. When appropriate, borrowed ideas or words should be accompanied by a signal phrase that names the author or otherwise alerts the reader that the information is from a source.

The best signal phrase connects the quote to the point you are trying to make/argue:

George Smith, another supporter of cloning and the President of the Human Cloning Foundation, believes that science fiction works have created hysteria in the popular media. Smith argues, "From Frankenstein to The Sixth Day, our popular media has done nothing but stir up the public's anxiety about monsters" (25).

Please Note:

- Quotes should never stand alone in your writing-- ALL quotes must be integrated and explained. Therefore, a paragraph should not end in a quotation.
- The bulk of your paper should always be YOUR thoughts/ideas/conclusions. Please keep in mind that I want a majority of each essay to consist of YOUR thoughts and ideas; I hope essays won't be just a "quilt" of other writer's ideas stitched together. Research and citations are meant to back you up, not to be the backbone of the paper.
- Only use reliable sources—try to find it from an academic database.

Omissions in Passages

According to the *MLA Handbook*, if you must omit a word, phrase, or sentence from a quoted passage, mark the omission with *ellipsis points* (. . .), or three spaced periods (80-81).

If you omit an entire sentence, use ellipsis points, and retain rules for end punctuation (always place a period at the end of a declarative sentence). In other words, use four periods, with no space before the first or after the last. Follow this rule for a quotation with an ellipsis at the end as well, except when a parenthetical citation follows the ellipses.

Original: “I know I have said this before and will say it again, but it bears repeating: if it’s not in the text, it doesn’t exist. We can only read what is present in a novel, play, or film. If something informed the author’s creation of the text but the evidence is not present in the text, that’s a matter for scholars concerned with motives, not with readers wrestling with meaning” (80).

Quote with Signal Phrase and Omission: In *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*, Thomas Foster emphasizes the importance of focusing on textual evidence: “I know I have said this before and will say it again, but it bears repeating: if it’s not in the text, it doesn’t exist. . . . If something informed the author’s creation of the text but the evidence is not present in the text, that’s a matter for scholars concerned with motives, not with readers wrestling with meaning” (80).

Explanation: Foster’s main point is that readers of literature should concern themselves with the evidence in the text. Pointing out that readers can only read what is actually present in a particular text is illustrative, but this assertion can be omitted without changing the meaning of the passage.

A Word of Caution: Never present a quote in a way that could cause a reader to misunderstand the original quote.

Other Alterations of Quotes

There may be some occasions when you need to alter a quote in order to prevent the audience from becoming confused.

Issue	Original Quote	Alteration	Example of Alteration	Explanation
Spelling or grammatical error	Lisa admitted, “Nothing can diminish my interest in Shakespeare .”	(sic)	Lisa admitted, “Nothing can diminish my interest in Shakespear” (sic).	The final “e” in Shakespeare is missing, so the writer has included (sic) after the quote to inform the audience that the spelling error is present in the original source.
Necessary Comment or Explanation	Although some aspects of the play are puzzling, there is no doubt that Hamlet wishes to avenge his father’s murder. He feels morally bound to do so.	brackets	Although some aspects of the play are puzzling, there is no doubt that Hamlet wishes to avenge his father’s murder. He [Hamlet] feels morally bound to do so.	Without clarifying the antecedent of the subject of the second sentence (he/Hamlet), readers may assume the subject is the closest masculine noun (Hamlet’s father).

Punctuation

1. When you formally introduce a quote, such as with a complete sentence, you can precede it with a colon (87).

In the book *Subliminal*, Leonard Mlodinow explains the role that technology has played in furthering our understanding of the unconscious: “The current revolution in thinking about the unconscious came about because, with modern instruments, we can watch as different structures and substructures in the brain generate feelings and emotions. We can measure the electrical output of individual neurons” (15).

2. When you introduce a quote, such as when you make the quote an integral part of the sentence structure, precede it with a comma or no punctuation (87).

As Harry Frankfurt cautions, “The fact that a person could not have avoided doing something is a sufficient condition of his having done it. But, as some of my examples show, this fact may play no role whatever in the explanation of why he did it” (8).

3. Additionally, the *MLA Handbook* advises to “use double quotation marks around quotations incorporated into the text and single quotation marks around quotations within those quotations” (87).

To further explain the principle of diminishing marginal utility of income, Watts quotes Abba Lerner, who argues that “The principle ‘can be derived from the assumption that consumers spend their income in a way that maximizes the satisfaction they can derive from the good obtained’” (Lerner qtd. in Watts 141).

4. If a quote ends with a question or an exclamation point, the original punctuation is retained.

“No!” she emphatically responded, for the third time.

5. Required commas and periods follow the citations, except when the quote is a block quote (88). All other punctuation marks—semicolons, colons, question marks, and exclamation points—go outside a closing quotation mark, except when they are part of the quoted material (89).

Do you agree with Watts’s view regarding the essential difference between persons and other creatures: that it is to be found in the “structure of a person’s will” (12)?

The question mark is not part of the quoted material, so it should be placed outside the closing quotation mark.

Titles

Some titles are quoted in MLA format. These are typically a part of a larger title (such as a song is a part of an album). Put quotes around songs, chapters, TV episodes, essays, and scenes.

Other titles are italicized in MLA format. These are typically larger forms of media that have smaller sections in them (as an album contains songs).

Use italics for albums, novels, TV series, books, plays, and movies.

Works Cited

Foster, Thomas. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines*. Revised Edition. Harper Perennial, 2014.

Frankfurt, Harry. *The Importance of What We Care About*. Cambridge UP, 1998.

Mlodinow, Leonard. *Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior*. Vintage Books, 2012.

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Smith, James Jr. *The Writer's Little Helper*. Writer's Digest Books, 2006.

Watts, Alan. *The Book on the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*. 1966. VintageBooks, 1989.

Adapted from <https://writingcommons.org/quoting-in-mla>