



USING QUOTES EFFECTIVELY

by the student editors of ***TACKLING YOUR FIRST COLLEGE PAPER***
a Students Helping Students™ book

Many papers you write in college will require you to include quotes from one or more sources. Even if you don't have to do it, integrating a few quotes into your writing can add life and persuasiveness to your arguments. The key is to use quotes to support a point you're trying to make rather than just include them to fill space.

"Quotes are like the evidence a lawyer presents to a judge. They are the only concrete things you have. You should use them to support your arguments."

**Senior,
Cornell University**

There are a few simple ways to use quotes in your paper. The first is not to quote at all and instead summarize the main points of a source. This approach works well for sources where the particular language of the quote is not especially important. If you're writing about history, paraphrasing is sometimes a great way to use secondary materials (the work of other historians and scholars) in your paper.

Another way to use source material is to quote a key word, phrase, or sentence that captures the essence of the text you're writing about. For example, if your paper is an attempt to explain the popularity of George W. Bush, and you're quoting a book by a very liberal writer, you might use the phrases "dynastic succession" and "crack monkey" in your paper. Carefully chosen words and phrases can really bring out your own arguments.

A third way to use quotes is to quote directly a whole block of text. These are called block-quotes and are usually single-spaced, placed in smaller font, and indented from the margins of the page. These are useful if there is a very rich passage in a source that is essential to your argument.

Make sure to connect quotes to your own arguments and to use each one to make your own points stronger. Analyze each quote you include, explain why it's significant and how it affects your own point. Professors hate seeing a bunch of quotes in a paper without understanding why they're there or what you intend to do with them beyond filling some space. Don't fall into this trap.

You should also make sure that the phrases and sentences you quote from other sources fit grammatically into your prose. For example:

The Backstreet Boys were an oasis in the cultural desert that was the late nineteen-nineties. Always modest, they never bragged about the impact they had on the development of a whole new genre of boy band music. In an MTV interview, they said that they merely hoped to "making beautiful songs."

See the problem? The writer didn't adjust the quote to fit grammatically into the last sentence. The quote should have been adjusted to read:

"They merely hoped to "mak[e] beautiful songs."

Use brackets to change verb tenses and clarify ambiguous pronouns (an undefined "he" or "she"). You can also adjust your own sentences to better align with the quotes. Whatever you do, make sure that you use quotes in a way that works grammatically with the rest of the sentence.

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