

Using Quotations: Quotation Rules¹

When you use quotations, you should include them to support MAJOR points you are claiming exist in the reading. They cannot replace your voice nor can they speak for you. In other words, the quotations cannot do your work for you. You must explain why you selected the quoted material and how you see it working to support your claims. Using quotations properly is a skill that can enhance your writing, but make sure you comply with all the necessary steps inherent in using quotes. **Make sure the quote is significant because you need to introduce it appropriately, offer its significance contextually, and provide cogent analysis as to its meaning and purpose for being included. Here are the rules:**

Q1: AVOID PLAGIARISM: When you are writing about another written work (commonly called “texts” or “sources”), you are obligated to place words/phrases taken directly from that work in quotation marks – unless they are common words used one or two at a time. You would not place quotation marks around words common words, but you would need to place quotation marks around words that are significant to the writer. If you quote a phrase or sentence, you must place quotation marks around them. To use words from another text without indicating they are not original by using quotations is plagiarism.

Ex. Dr. King states that, “It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment.”

Q2. QUOTE EXACTLY: When you place words in quotation marks, you are signaling to a reader that these are precisely the words in the source. The source is SACRED! Make sure you respect it!

Ex. According to Dr. King, the founding fathers made a “promise that all men” would be given “the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Q3. USE BLOCK QUOTES TO PROPERLY SET OFF QUOTATIONS OF FOUR OR MORE TYPED LINES FROM THE BODY OF YOUR TEXT: Block quotes are generally introduced by a complete sentence followed by a colon. Indent the entire quotation 10 spaces from the left (using hanging left indent) but keep the right margin the same. Continue to double-space. Do not put quotation marks around a block quotation; by setting it off the 10 spaces, your reader knows it’s a quotation.

Ex. Dr. King states:

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One

¹ This document is the work of Dr. Arend Flick.

hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.

- Q4. YOU NEED TO BRIDGE INTO QUOTATIONS SMOOTHLY AND GRAMMATICALLY PROVIDING CLEAR CONTEXTS TO ENABLE READERS TO UNDERSTAND THEM.** This can become a very tedious job; simply acknowledge who is speaking the quotation and state why it is significant.

Ex. Referring to Abraham Lincoln, King states that, “five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation.”

- Q5. DON'T ALLOW QUOTATIONS TO BECOME “DETACHED” FROM YOUR SENTENCE:** “Floating” quotations can usually be avoided by making sure you introduce the quote and punctuate properly before the actual quotation itself.

Ex. Dr. King does not want people to resort to violence; he says, “we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.”

- Q6. USE AN ELLIPSIS TO INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE OMITTED A PORTION OF THE QUOTATION:** On occasion, you may want to omit words or sentences (even paragraphs, pages, and chapters) from a quotation. To do so, simply use three spaced periods (an ellipsis) to indicate that the quotation has pieces missing. Also, since the ellipsis is NOT part of the original text, it may be enclosed in brackets [. . .].

Ex. Dr. King says, “I have a dream that one day, [...] little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.”

NOTE: Ellipsis is also used at the end of a quotation if you do not finish the sentence! Do not forget to punctuate appropriately.

- Q7. USE BRACKETS [] TO INDICATE YOU HAVE ADDED SOMETHING TO A QUOTATION, EITHER FOR CLARIFICATION OR TO MAKE THE QUOTATION FIT MORE GRAMMATICALLY INTO YOUR SENTENCE:**

Ex. King states that our founding fathers “sign[ed] a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.”