



Effective Use of Direct Quotations & Source Integration

In the social sciences--fields like psychology, sociology, criminal justice and such--you will generally find that quoting is limited and often confined to the "review of literature" part of the report. This is not the case in the humanities. Quotations are an important part of the academic conversation in the humanities and must be used effectively. So let's begin with some general advice:

Advice: Practice can vary widely according to the type of document being composed, as well as its audience and purpose. General rules are fine, but ultimately you are better off following the accepted practices in your discipline.

Advice: Your commentary on/analysis of a quote should be at least as long as the quote itself or else you might be guilty of "padding."

Advice: The reader must be able to understand the **reason** for why something was quoted other than to fill up space. Here is a nice list of justifications for quotations from <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/research/usingquotes.html>:

- Use quotations when the specific language of a quote is important.
- Use quotations when accuracy is essential -- to indicate the writer's exact position.
- Use quotations to support your argument, rather than relying upon someone else's words.
- Keep quotes to a minimum. A short phrase or sentence is more easily understood than a long quotation.
- Look for the "kernel" or the most important part of the quotation and extract it.

Causes of Over Quotation?

There are usually several main causes that often reinforce each other:

Cause 1. Poor note-taking skills/practice. Fact: the more the researcher copies directly from the source without summarizing/paraphrasing during the note-taking phase, the higher the amount of direct quotation in the final product. Don't be lazy. Paraphrase and summarize your sources during the note-taking stage or you will pay for it later.

Cause 2. Still stuck in high school. Over quoting is a characteristic of students stuck in a high school understanding of the "research paper" and research. They do not know or have not mastered this important concept:

Sources should be used to support your points, not make your points.

Many beginning writers do not associate essay writing (their own thesis + main points) with the research paper and process. The research process should help you refine your own thesis and main points about a topic. When

you then write the essay, you use research materials to support your main points, which you came up with.

If you are using too many quotations in a draft, try to see that draft as a set of research notes. Read them over, then fashion a strong outline built around your own view of a topic.

Cause 3. Lack of confidence as a writer and fear of plagiarism also come into play. Beginning researchers/writers with highly negative views of their abilities often have emotional resistance to using their own voice and words.

Cause 4. Finally, there is just plain old not understanding what the assignment is calling for. **For example,** research assignments can usually be divided into two kinds: argumentative and analytical:

The **argumentative** topic will ask you to state your opinion on an issue and to defend it with reasons and information. Often this kind of assignment asks you to take a stance on potentially controversial topics:

Should the practice of capital punishment be discontinued in the United States?

The professor in this criminal justice class wants students to take a stance and support that stance with **arguments** and data covered in the course: the concept of effective deterrence, inhumane treatment, economics of detention and other elements of this debate. However, consider this writing assignment from a political science class:

Compare the current practice of capital punishment in democratic and non-democratic societies.

Now, this is an **analytic** topic. You are not being asked to express your opinion on capital punishment. Rather, you are being asked to analyze data and present the results of your analysis ("Capital punishment is more common in non-democratic societies").

Using Direct Quotes Effectively

A direct quote is putting the exact words from a source into your writing setting it off with quotation marks [""]. As pointed out above, you should use a direct quote when the author is saying something in a way that is interesting, to the point, and in a manner that you cannot put into words yourself. You should avoid directly quoting things that just about anyone can put into words. But if the tone and language of the quote is colorful and says something you can't, quote it. Once you have decided to directly quote something, you need to effectively integrate it within your paragraph. To do so, here are a few helpful tips:

1. Avoid starting a paragraph with a quote. The first sentence of every paragraph should be the topic sentence in which you explain the paragraph's purpose. A quote does not make for an effective topic sentence. In addition, you always want to begin and end every paragraph with your own voice.
2. Quotes should never stand alone as one sentence. You must always introduce the quoted information. This can be done by stating something like, "According to John Doe's article" or "As Mr. Doe argues" or something similar. This will alert your reader that a quote is coming. In addition, it tells the reader a little about your source, which adds credence to your own writing.
3. Never force the reader to come to her own conclusions about your source material. Always explain why the

source material is important to your paragraph and how it helps support your paragraph topic.

4. Avoid ending a paragraph with source material. First, this does not allow you to comment on the material. Second, as I mentioned earlier, you should always begin and end each paragraph with your own voice.

If you follow the tips above, you will be sure to make your source material that you want to quote directly, work for you. In addition, you will avoid having your source material take over your essay.

[University of Virginia's Integrating Quotations](http://www.engl.virginia.edu/writing/wctr/Quotations.html)

<<http://www.engl.virginia.edu/writing/wctr/Quotations.html>>

[The University of Wisconsin at Madison Integrating Quotations](http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/QuoLiterature.html)

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Integrating Your Quotations & Other Source Material: Two Signals You Must Know

Here are two important tricks that all good research writers use: **Signal your source. Signal your commentary.** These techniques help you avoid the single most common problem when writing research papers: the failure to make a clear distinction between what belongs to you and what belongs to your sources. The failure to make that distinction often leads to the charge of plagiarism.

Another important reason to use these both signals (**Signal your source. Signal your commentary.**) as often as you can is this: The signals help your paper to flow more smoothly and to be more convincing. Since your sources can only support your ideas (not make them for you), the signals help the reader see how your arguments are supported by experts in the field.

Signal Your Source

Whether it's a quotation or a summary in your own words, signaling your source means to introduce it:

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, "Job opportunities for teachers over the next 10 years will vary from good to excellent, depending on the locality, grade level, and subject taught." ¹

The quotation is preceded by the signal phrase "According to the U.S. Department of Labor." This signal phrase clearly says to your reader: **Here is a source to back me up!**

Signal Verbs (Keep this list handy):

Your sources can: address, admit, analyze, believe, confess, confirm, contribute, critique, debate, debunk, defend, define, discover, disprove, establish, evaluate, examine, extend, finish, formulate, identify, prepare, propose, question, recommend, reiterate, report, suggest, think, urge--and a lot of other things. Examples:

A report by Richard Rodderick **defends** the practice of xenotransplantation by pointing to the 97 lives saved in one year in California.

A report by Richard Rodderick **recommends** the practice of xenotransplantation, pointing to the 97 lives saved in one year in California by the procedure.

A report by Richard Rodderick **establishes** a baseline of successful xenotransplantation cases with 97 lives saved in one year in California by the procedure.

Signal Your Commentary

After you have signaled your source and used it, you have one more task as a research writer: Now you must comment on the source you just used. The comment that you make allows you to integrate the source into your thinking. The comment should provide a clear connection between the source and the point you are making.

The comment also serves as the second of two brackets at either end of your source. Here are the two brackets in red, with the source sandwiched between:

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, "Job opportunities for teachers over the next 10 years will vary from good to excellent, depending on the locality, grade level, and subject taught." ² **The rating of "good to excellent" places teaching at the top of my career list.**