Using Quotes Successfully

You can think of a quote as a "unit" with three parts:

[Introduction/Background] ["Quote" (Citation)] [Explanation/Analysis]

The introduction and explanation surround and support your use of the quote. You can even start building paragraphs out of these three-part units, if the quotes are all related to that paragraph's topic. See tips for each part below.

1. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The first time you quote a source, it is important provide the author's credibility. What is the author's expertise or credentials and why should we trust what he/she says?

> *Harvard psychologist Jane Smith has conducted several studies on the sleep patterns of college students and published her findings in the nation's foremost scientific journals.*

If you have already told the reader about this source's credibility, integrate the quote into your own sentence using one of these strategies:

- **Quote introduced with an explanatory sentence + a colon.** You can attach a quote to another sentence with just a colon if that sentence helps to explain the main idea in the quote.

  > *Dr. Smith observes how extended stress affects students' ability to sleep: "QUOTE" (Smith 79).*

- **Your own words + quote flow together into a complete sentence.** If you find a way to create a whole sentence by combining your words plus part of a quote then you don't need any extra punctuation. This is the most condensed version of the three-part unit.

  > *If, as Dr. Smith writes, "the average college-age person can only accommodate stress to a certain extent before he or she requires more sleep than normal to recuperate," then simply sleeping in on weekends or scheduling classes later in the day is not enough (Smith 79).*

- **Quote introduced with signal phrase**, such as "says," "according to," "argues," etc. with a comma between the signal phrase and the quote. This is the most common way of introducing quotes.

  > *According to Dr. Smith, "QUOTE" (Smith 79).*

2. THE QUOTE ITSELF

Remember that quotes should always be supporting your own observations and analysis, not taking over your paper and putting everything in someone else's words. Sometimes this requires manipulating a quote.

- **Add with [Brackets]**: You can add words to a quote or make small changes to words within a quote by using [brackets]. Only add/make small changes to a quote when it is necessary for either clarification or making the quote flow better into your own words.
- **Delete with Ellipses (...)**: You can delete words from a quote to make it shorter by using ellipses marks (...). Do not use ellipses marks at the beginning or end of a quote. Only use them if you take out words or phrases from the middle of the quote.

Warning: Although it is good to know how to properly manipulate a quote in order to integrate it better into your work, do not change the quote so much that it has a meaning different from the original meaning.

3. EXPLAIN THE QUOTE

Ask yourself, what's the main message in the quote that I want the reader to focus on? Why is the quote significant? How does the quote support my claim? The answers may seem apparent to you, but not everyone interprets things the same way, so it's a good idea to explain to your readers how you interpret the quote and how it relates to your paragraph and claims.

> *From Dr. Smith's findings, it is clear that finding time for sleep is not the only problem facing students, but that even a consistent sleep schedule can only do so much if they are experiencing too much stress. Schools must address both aspects of this problem.*