A Guide To Using Quotations

The following is a guide to some of the accepted ways of quoting and interpreting in academic writing. You will find that these are the crucial conventions that help you actively engage the readings. They also support the clarity and depth of your writing and help give your papers a polished look.

I. NAMING AND INTRODUCING TITLES AND AUTHORS (See page 32)

1. Name and introduce authors
2. Make authors credible sources
3. Name readings and orient readers
4. Avoid wordy or unclear introductions to authors and readings

II. INTRODUCING, INTEGRATING, AND INTERPRETING QUOTATIONS (See page 33)

1. Introduce the Quotation
2. Integrate the quotation into a sentence
3. Interpret the quotation by closely rephrasing it

III. JUDGING HOW MUCH TO QUOTE (See page 36)

1. Quote only the parts of the passage or sentence that you are going to discuss
2. Define your terms as briefly as possible
3. Do not alter, oversimplify, or distort the author’s meaning

I. NAMING AND INTRODUCING TITLES AND AUTHORS

1. Name and introduce authors
   - Give the author’s whole name the first time you mention the person.
   - Use the author’s last name for all later references.

In the introduction of Rereading America, Gary Colombo, professor of English at Los Angeles City College, discusses the relationship between cultural myths and critical thinking. Colombo believes that myths limit people’s ability to question beliefs that seem unquestionable.
2. Make authors credible sources

- Who is this individual and why should I trust him or her?

The idea that schools shortchange students in vocational courses is discussed by Mike Rose, professor of education at UCLA, in his essay “I Just Wanna Be Average.”

Melissa Algranati, the daughter of immigrant parents and author of “Being an Other,” speaks out about the dilemma of interethnic children within American culture.

3. Name readings and orient readers

- Give the whole title of a reading the first time you mention it.
  - Underline or italicize the titles of books, journals, and magazines.
  - Use quotation marks around the titles of essays, articles, sections of books, selections from anthologies.
- Provide some idea of what the reading is about

In their introduction to *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.*, Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon explain how advertisers draw on cultural knowledge to market products, often to unsuspecting consumers.

Roland Marchand, Professor of History at University of California, Davis, explores how semiotics functions in 1920s American advertising in his essay “The Parable of the Democracy of Goods.”

4. Avoid wordy or unclear introductions to authors and readings.

- Avoid overuse of forms of the verb “to be” (is, was, were, etc.)
- Use accurate verbs to explain the author’s stance. Verbs like “explores” or “describes” are more effective than verbs like “talks about” or “says.”
- “I believe that,” “We see,” and “I think” are generally unnecessary.

**First Draft:** In the author William Maxwell’s essay, which is called “Coming of Age in Indiana,” I believe is says that geography divides our citizens more than it unifies them.

**Revised Draft:** In “Coming of Age in Indiana,” William Maxwell explores how geography divides our citizens more than it unifies them.

II. INTRODUCING, INTEGRATING, AND INTERPRETING QUOTATIONS

1. Introduce the quotation.

- Name the author.
- Provide any information the reader would need to understand the quotation.
Define unfamiliar key terms.
Let the reader know what the author was discussing in the paragraph from which the quotation was taken.
Explain how the quotation is connected to the author’s broader ideas.

- Give some clue about what you want the reader to see in the quotation, especially how it furthers your theory.
- Don’t start a paragraph with a quotation, since you won’t be able to introduce it.
- Don’t end a paragraph with a quotation, since you won’t be able to discuss it properly.

**First Draft:** High school is a struggle for some students. “I just wanna be average,” says one of them.

**Revised Draft:** Rose’s essay highlights the struggle some students face in high school. One of Rose’s classmates, Ken Harvey, for example, stopped fighting against the demoralizing aspects of school and decided only to do enough to get by. “I just wanna be average,” Harvey said one day, shocking Rose into thinking about how much a person loses by not aiming for something higher (166).

2. **Integrate the quotation into a sentence.**

- One way to avoid a stand-alone quotation is to adapt it to fit grammatically into your own sentence, again reflecting the relationship between the quotation and your theory.
  - If you need to add or change a word to make the quotation fit your sentence, use square brackets to indicate the changes you’ve made.
  - If you need to eliminate certain words, use ellipses.

  **First Draft:** Mike Rose’s account shows how important a role the teacher plays. “Students will float to the mark you set” (35). Teachers must respond to this truth with action.

  **Revised Draft:** Mike Rose’s account shows that “[s]tudents will float to the mark [teachers] set,” a truth that should challenge all classroom instructors to action (35).

- Be certain that any changes you’ve made to a quotation do not alter or distort the author’s meaning. This includes stating that the authors believe something they don’t.

  **First Draft:** Barlett and Steele explain that “if you’re not a part of this new America, you have no one to blame but yourself” (358).

  **Revised Draft:** Barlett and Steele explain that “the winners say if you’re not a part of this new America, you have no one to blame but yourself” (358), a position the authors violently oppose.

- When introducing a quote, use a signal phrase and accurate verb—like “Solomon argues” or “she acknowledges” or “he insists that”—to avoid a stand-alone quotation. Show how the quotation forwards your theory and relates to the ideas of the other texts—how it confirms, contradicts, complicates.
Example #1 (signal phrase, accurate verb)

**First Draft:** McDonald’s continues to leap above its competition in both profits and recognition, and Solomon explains that this success is due in part to its carefully constructed ad campaigns. “No company approaches McDonald’s transformation of itself into a symbol of American culture” (414).

**Revised Draft:** McDonald’s continues to leap above its competition in both profits and recognition, and Solomon claims that this success is due in part to its carefully constructed ad campaigns. He asserts, “No company approaches McDonald’s transformation of itself into a symbol of American culture” (414).

Example #2 (complication)

**First Draft:** Mike Rose received good grades from MacFarland. He says that grades were “some sort of spectroscopic readout that said, objectively and publicly, that [he] had made something of value” (166). Mantisios says low social status negatively affects educational achievement.

**Revised Draft:** Mike Rose’s success in having received good grades from MacFarland, grades that defined, “objectively and publicly, that [he] had made something of value,” suggests there’s something more at play in real-life classroom interactions than what Mantsios’ statistics reveal when linking school performance with economic class.

Example #3 (forward theory)

**First Draft:** Rodriguez admired his teachers more than he did his parents. “I began by imitating their accents, using their diction, trusting their every direction” (198).

**Revised Draft:** In order to be successful, one may have to change for education. Change was inevitable for Rodriguez who eagerly broke ties with his family of origin in favor of basking in his teachers’ praise, “imitating their accents, using their diction, [and] trusting their every direction” (198).

3. **Interpret the quotation by closely rephrasing it.**

- Interpret the quotation fully and accurately, referring to its key terms and/or examples.
- Teach readers what you want them to understand about the quotation rather than assuming the meaning is obvious or that readers would interpret it in the same way you do.
- Show how the quotation furthers your theory and relates to the other texts.
- Don’t end a paragraph with a quotation, since you won’t be able to rephrase it.

**First Draft:** The editors of *Literacies* say that we “risk an encounter” when we read (xiv). Another author who talks about what is at stake in reading is Gary Colombo.
Revised Draft: The editors of *Literacies* say that we “risk an encounter” when we read (xiv). We encounter ideas and experiences that are new to us, and sometimes these are so powerful that we find that we must change our mind about something very basic in our lives. Because people are often conservative about their own values and resist change, and because change can be painful, we see that openly encountering the ideas of others is a risk. Gary Colombo further argues that we must risk challenging our cultural values to open ourselves to new ideas.

III. JUDGING HOW MUCH TO QUOTE

1. Quote only the parts of the passage or sentence that you are going to discuss.

   First Draft: Eli’s reading practices at home and at school have similar elements: “When Eli got to school, he found a similar definition of reading in operation. He and Mary were helped to select and manage text. Their attention was directed toward what mattered in the text and away from what did not. They were helped to discover the single right answer to every question. They had only to recall information without interpreting or extending it in any significant way” (245). It is precisely these habits that encourage continuity and stability in the Amish culture.

   Revised Draft: Eli’s reading practices both at home and at school help develop his ability to “discover the single right answer” and “recall information without interpreting” (245). It is precisely these habits that encourage continuity and stability in the Amish culture.

2. Define your terms as briefly as possible, again using only as much of the quoted material as you need.

   First Draft: Barnlund says that human beings need to create meaning in their lives. “The world each person creates for himself is a distinctive world, not the same world others occupy. Each fashions from every incident whatever meanings fit his own private biases. These biases, taken together, constitute what has been called the ‘assumptive world of the individual.’ The world each person gets inside his head is the only world he knows” (53). Experience, then, becomes a matter of perspective.

   Revised Draft: Barnlund says that because human beings need to create meaning in their lives they carve out a private world with rules, biases and prejudices that “constitute the ‘assumptive world of the individual’” (53). Experience, then, becomes a matter of perspective.

3. Be certain that any changes you’ve made to the quotation do not alter, oversimplify, or distort the author’s meaning.

   First Draft: Barlett and Steele say that “if you’re not a part of this new America, you have no one to blame but yourself” (358).

   Revised Draft: Barlett and Steele point out that “the winners say if you’re not a part of this new America, you have no one to blame but yourself” (358).