

The Neglected Art of Quoting

Quoting is an important part of college writing, because it allows you to support your points with textual evidence from other writers. Students often run into problems as they quote, however, ranging from using quotes incorrectly to choosing the wrong material to include in the quote. Here are a few tips to help you with using quotations in your college writing.

1. **All quotes need to be introduced and explained.** Avoid “dropping” a quote into your essay without first introducing it, then providing the quote, then explaining it. Your reader will have trouble following what you’re saying or why you’re providing a quote in this space. A student might write something like:

Heartbreak is a common topic in songs because it is an emotion many people can relate to. “You didn’t have to stoop so low, have your friends collect your records and then change your number” (Gotye). Many people have been through breakups, and songs help them get through these difficult times.

Instead, the student needs to provide the **“quote burger,”** where the quote is introduced and then explained. This way, the reader will understand why the quote is being used and how it is relevant to the point he or she is making.

Heartbreak is a common topic in songs because it is an emotion many people can relate to. **In his song, “Somebody That I Used to Know,” Gotye sings,** “You didn’t have to stoop so low, have your friends collect your records and then change your number.” **The speaker of the song is hurt by the actions that his ex-girlfriend has taken to remove him from her life, which may be an experience familiar to listeners.** Many people have been through breakups, and songs help them get through these difficult times.



2. **Where possible, quotes should be incorporated into the flow of the sentence.** Rather than introducing a quote with “The author states...” or “A quote that supports my point is...”, you might consider structuring your wording so that the quote can be integrated seamlessly into the sentence. This is often a sign of a sophisticated writing style, and shows that you can make textual evidence work for you as you maintain control of your paper. An example from the Purdue Owl:

In his famous and influential work *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud argues that dreams are the “royal road to the unconscious” (57), expressing in coded imagery the dreamer’s unfulfilled wishes through a process known as the “dream-work” (59).

3. Use ellipses to leave out unnecessary information from your quote.

Use three ellipses (. . .) to omit *part of a sentence* from your quote. Here's an example from Grammar Girl (<http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/ellipsis.aspx>):

In the *Contra Costa Times*, Randy Myers writes, "The outrageous 'Greek' works better than 'Funny People' at least in part because Apatow, who tends to make films that meander too much, hands over writing and directing to a protégé." If I wanted to quote Myers, and I had limited space, I could use an ellipsis to shorten the quotation: "The outrageous 'Greek' works better than 'Funny People' . . . because Apatow hands over writing and directing to a protégé."

Use four ellipses (. . . .) to omit *one or more complete sentences* from your quote. This is really just a period to end your sentence, then three ellipses to signify omitted information.

4. Use brackets to clarify your quote and/or help it flow within your sentence.

Since you need to quote exactly as your quote appears in the original text, sometimes the subject of your quote can be unclear. In this case, you can use a bracket after the word you want to clarify. The quote "He was a total jerk to Taylor Swift" is potentially unclear. "He [**Kanye West**] was a total jerk to Taylor Swift" is much better.

Brackets can also be used to change the grammar within a quote so that it flows better within your sentence.

It also casts women as subservient and subordinate to the needs of their children: "mothers are pushed to reinforce the notion that [**the child is**] the center of the universe, his thoughts and feelings the only ones worth considering, the ones that cut in line before everyone else's" (308).

5. Engage in good-faith quoting; do not use ellipses or brackets to alter the meaning of the quote.

The movie critic Roger Ebert may say something like, "This is not a great movie." It would not be a good idea, then to say, "Roger Ebert called *The Expendables 2* "a great movie."