

Quoting Formula¹

WRTG 1150/1250/3020

Although this is a “quoting formula,” the same basic rules apply any time you want to communicate information or opinions that come from another source.

Why should you use quotes, paraphrases, or summaries?

As you research and begin writing your paper, remember that good arguments require EVIDENCE. We usually provide evidence by bringing in information from outside sources in order to provide proof (evidence) for the points you want to make. This evidence exists in three forms:

- quotations (only when that information is unique and absolutely cannot be said any better by you),
- paraphrases (I really don't like them for reasons we talked about in class), or
- summaries (the preferred method – communicating the “gist” of what that author is saying).

Do you have to follow the “rules”?

Yes. When you use quotes,² you need to make sure you use them effectively. This means following the conventions (rules) that have evolved about the proper way to cite information – because this is what your audience expects and this is what will build your credibility as an author.

Although your writing should not be formulaic, the process of putting quotes into your writing should follow a fairly specific formula. Make sure you include *all* of the following elements – and in this order.

The quoting formula

1. **Context**
2. **Signal**
3. **Quote**
4. **End signal**
5. **Citation**
6. **Explanation**

1. Context

You must give context for your quote. You have to make sure that you have introduced your topic, and tell about where the quote comes from. The author, his or her credentials, the source (title of publication), and other information that you provide here will help the reader know more about the quote that is coming. And it helps the reader judge what they read next.

Example:

Dr. Arthur Hundhausen, a Yale professor of astronomy and culinary arts, has recently published an article in “Lunar” magazine about the geological and chemical composition of the moon.

2. Signal

You need a signal that a quote or paraphrase is coming. For a direct quotation, use quotation marks (“”). For a paraphrase or summary, use a signal phrase (*according to Hundhausen,*). This is especially important when paraphrasing or summarizing because your reader needs to know where your source's ideas begin.

3. Quote, paraphrase or summary

This is where you include the direct quote or your summary of information.

Example:

“Repeated chemical analyses of the surface of the lunar body demonstrate that it has a composition high in carbon, nitrates, mold-like spores, and lactic acid.”

4. End Signal

You need to signal the end of your quote. For a direct quote, use quotation marks (....”). For a paraphrase or summary, make sure the reader knows that there is a shift from the imported author’s ideas back to your own ideas (*This demonstrates....*).

5. Citation

This is absolutely essential! You MUST give credit to the author or source of your information. You can name your source before the quote, or you can use parenthetical citation at the end of your quote. If you do not include this information, you will be plagiarizing!

Examples:

On page 665, Hundhausen concludes that ~ OR ~ green cheese” (Hundhausen 665).

6. Explanation

Do not assume that other people understand your quote, your interpretation of it, and why you included it. You must explain what the quote means, and how it supports (positively or negatively) your thesis or the topic sentence.

Examples:

This research by Hundhausen and other experts demonstrates that after years of speculation and old wives’ tales, we can now say with confidence that the moon is, indeed, made of green cheese.

~ OR ~

Hundhausen’s research has been condemned by scientists around the world who argue his hypothesis is full of holes.

All of the above elements of the quoting formula are essential, and following the formula will prevent “floating” quotes.

BUT, just following these steps will not insure total success! You need to choose quotes that fit into your argument and highlight important points. There is no formula for how many quotes (pieces of information) you should have in each paragraph, or how long each should be. But a good guideline is that you may want to use between one and two pieces of information per main idea – you don’t want your paper to be one long string of quotes. Also, don’t use extremely long quotations – research shows that readers skip over them. Find a section of that outside text that gets right to the point and include it. And remember that this outside source may not have just the right quotation that you need – you very well may be able to summarize the point you want to make better and in fewer words than the other author can.

Endnotes

1. This handout is heavily based on Orly Hersh’s Quoting Formula.
2. “Quotes” is shorthand for quotation, paraphrase and summary throughout the rest of this handout.