



Center for Writing and Speaking

F NO. 2 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

Effective Quoting in the Humanities

Quotations are important components of any successful analysis paper in the humanities. As important as they are, quotations are not substitutes for your words or analysis, and they cannot stand alone. Note: This handout uses MLA style citation. Consult your assignment sheet for citation style requirements. Remember, other disciplines use quotations differently and require different citation styles.

Quotations are valuable.

Quotations provide convincing proof for your thesis. When they are accompanied by your commentary, they connect the text with your thesis and present the necessary evidence to understand your argument. Without your analysis, a wonderful quotation is an example of the author's talent, not yours.

Quotations capture the author's language.

Quotations are important for support but are also useful when the author's words could not possibly be improved.

Example: Eliot's "hollow men" grope blindly on their "last of meeting places" (101) and, avoiding speech and eye contact, wait for death.

Cite as you write.

Keep up with your quotations and make sure you cite them as you write in order to avoid plagiarism. Note page numbers, book titles, and authors. Also important is knowing what citation style you should use. In the humanities, most instructors require MLA style citation.

Avoid floating quotations.

Quotations should not be dropped into a sentence without introduction. Instead, they should be included with your commentary and should be introduced in your words.

Example: Ferdinand's love for Miranda enables him to overcome the difficulty of his work for Prospero. As he works, he states, "The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead/And makes my labors pleasures" (III, i, 6-7).

Be careful with long quotations.

Consider breaking passages into sentence-long quotations. Use only what is necessary and complements your commentary. If you do use a long quotation, make sure you still analyze it.

Example: Mina explains the encounter, "Dracula placed one hand on upon my shoulder and, holding tight, bared my throat with the other;" however, she explains that she was irrepressibly attracted to him so that "strangely enough I did not want to hinder him" (Stoker 251).

Try using keywords or phrases.

They can offer effective support for your thesis, while integrating the author's words into your sentences.

Example: Reminiscent of the novel's earlier scene of Durbyfield's domestic life, the "distracted hens in the coop" represent a possible fate for Tess (Hardy 258).

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