

QUOTABLE QUOTES: EFFECTIVE QUOTING IN THE HUMANITIES

No. 16 in the Writing Center Handout Series

Quotations are important components of any successful analysis paper in the humanities. They are especially important for literature papers. As important as they are, quotations are not substitutes for your words or analysis, and they cannot stand alone. Here are some points to keep in mind as you integrate quotes into your writing. Note: This handout uses MLA style citation. Consult your assignment sheet for citation style requirements.

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 as if they were already gathered on the beach of the "tumid river" (103) that would carry them into hell.

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. It is also important to know what citing style you should use. In the humanities, most instructors require MLA style citation.

Avoid floating quotes. 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 quotes. Consider breaking passages into sentence-long quotes. 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 key words 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).

For practical examples of quotations in action, check out the sample papers available in the Writing Center. Remember, other disciplines use quotations differently and require different citation styles.

For more information on quotes and citing, see

The New St. Martin's Handbook, pages 383-389

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx_basic.html

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_quotprsum.html (punctuation)

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/mla.html> (citing)



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