

MLA QUOTATION HANDOUT

What is MLA Citation?

MLA is a style in which a writer formats his/her essays. There are many different styles—APA, Chicago, etc. — so you should ask your instructors which style to use for their assignments. For writing classes, and most humanities courses, we will use MLA. This means that when using sources, you need to have in-text citations and a works cited page. For this workshop, we will focus on using quotations and citing them in-text.

When should I use a quotation?

When asked to use a source in your essay, you must decide whether to quote or paraphrase. Quoting is taking a sentence or a phrase, word for word, from a source and placing it in between quotation marks “ ”, whereas paraphrasing is using an idea from a source, but putting it in your own words. You are generally encouraged to paraphrase your source’s ideas, but there are times when quotation is more useful:

1. When you are responding to a specific claim made by another author. It’s always best to quote that claim directly
2. When you are analyzing lines from a poem or a play. It’s important to include the original words
3. When you have conducted an interview and feel that the “way” your question is answered is just as important as the answer itself
4. Generally, whenever you feel that something will be “lost in translation” if you re-phrase the original words

You want to make sure that you’re not including quotes as “fillers,” i.e. ways to meet your word count, and that you’re not “quote dumping”, i.e. including big chunks of quotation without discussing the ideas. Consider using quotes purposefully as a way to:

1. Respond to ideas in the quote, whether you agree with them or wish to challenge the author’s claims
2. Support your own ideas:
 - By using an example to demonstrate your idea
 - By referring to expert opinion to show your credibility
 - By including statistical data as a point of reference

Therefore, quotes should be used sparingly so that yours is the main voice in the paper. Consider this ratio: for every **one** line of quotation, write about **three** lines of commentary addressing the ideas in the quote.

How do I cite my quotations in-text?

When quoting or paraphrasing you need to refer to your source either before or after the quotation/paraphrase. On first reference, you should introduce the author(s) and title, place the quotation/paraphrase, and then put the page number or (if you have it) in parentheses followed by punctuation.

Basic Quote

Example:

In “Shooting an Elephant” George Orwell claims, “when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib” (122).

*Book/magazine titles are underlined or placed in Italics, whereas article/essay titles are put in quotation marks.

Upon subsequent references to the same author, you can put the last name in parentheses or simply refer to the author by his/her last name.

Example:

Despite being a member of the British army, he realized “the futility of the white man’s dominion in the East” (Orwell 122).

OR

Orwell realized “the futility of the white man’s dominion in the East” (122).

If you don’t have an author, then list the title.

Example:

Many holistic doctors argue that BMI is “a grossly inaccurate measure of obesity” (*Holistic Health*).

Block Quote

The aforementioned format applies to four lines of quotation or less. For quotations that are longer than four lines, you will need to “block quote.” This means that you’ll need to format the quote separate from the paragraph. Start the quotation on a new line and indent the entire quote **one inch** (about two tabs) from the left margin. Do not place quotation marks around the quote, but do place the punctuation before the parenthetical citation.

Example:

I was young and ill-educated and I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. I did not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it. All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible. (Orwell 119)

Quote within a Quote

Often times you'll come across a quote that is from another source. You'll be relieved to know that you don't have to dig up the initial source but you do have to indicate that it's a "quote within a quote."

Example:

Six years after her divorce, Shelly said that she is "still healing from all the emotional pain" (qtd in "American Family").

OR

Dr. Andrew Herrera said many of his patients "take a long time to recover. One patient, Shelly, is 'still healing from all the emotional pain' after six years" ("American Family").

As you can see in this second example, Shelly's words are offset by single (instead of double) quotation marks.

Changing a Quote

If you want to change a word in a quote for grammar purposes you can as long as you place the revised word in brackets [].

Example (from the block quote above):

Orwell said, "[he] was young and ill-educated and [he] had had to think out [his] problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East" (119).

Or if you wanted to take out a portion of the quote you can do so by putting ellipses... in place of the words you took out. If is in the middle of the sentence, put three ellipses, but if you are taking out information to join two separate sentences, place four ellipses.

Example:

In "Shooting an Elephant," George Orwell claims, "when the white man turns tyrant.... He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib" (122).

For more information on in-text citation, please consult:

- Quick Access (PCC's MLA Handbook)
- OWL Purdue's website (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/03/>)

This handout was created by Sally Badawi for PCC Rock Creek's Mighty Pen Workshop series.