Using quotations and quotation marks in college writing

Written by Jay Brandes. Updated 9/8/2011. This material was prepared as part of the Troy University class presentation *Writing a Plagiarism-free Research Paper*.

Always follow the writing style prescribed by your instructor. For American Psychological Association (APA) style, the guidebook is the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Sixth Edition. For Modern Language Association (MLA) style, use the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Seventh Edition.

Using quotation, paraphrasing, and summarizing to integrate information sources into a research paper takes time and practice. **The handout you are reading now focuses on many of the technical aspects of quotation.** To better understand when, why, and how to use these three methods of integrating information sources, the following resources are recommended:

From the Troy University Writing Center, the publication, *Quoting, Paraphrasing, Summarizing* <http://troy.troy.edu/writingcenter/research.html>. From the Purdue University Online Writing Center (OWL), the handout also titled, *Quoting, Paraphrasing, Summarizing* <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/1/>.

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SUMMARY

A quotation is exact (word-for-word) use of what someone has written or said.

Document all information sources you quote. To document means to include citations in the body of the paper, and the corresponding reference or works cited entry at the end of the paper. (Note that information that is not quoted word-for-word must also be documented.)

Know that there is a specific way to document indirect (secondary) information sources (a source from within another source). See the *Quoting Secondary Sources* section of this handout.

Always put direct quotations in quotation marks. The only expectation is for long quotes—see the *Block Quotations* section of this handout.

Double quotation marks are used to enclose a quotation.

> Will Rogers is often quoted as saying, "I never met a man I didn't like."

Single quotation marks are used only to enclose a quotation inside another quotation.

> Susan said to me, "Will Rogers is often quoted as saying, 'I never met a man I didn't like.'"

In the United States, in all forms of writing (not just college writing), punctuation marks almost always go inside closing quotation marks. But, citation information goes outside the quote mark and before a period. (See your style manual for what to do if the quote ends in a question mark or exclamation point.)

> Example of a cited quote that ends in a period: "I'm trying to figure out where I can go that the cops won't be looking for me" (Palahniuk 187).

For the citation above, the long entry at the end of a paper would look like this:

MLA style: Palahniuk, Chuck. *Fight Club*. New York, Norton, 1996. Print.

APA style: Palahniuk, C. (1996). *Fight club*. New York, NY: Norton.

Microsoft Word will allow you to set its default to the curly, professional looking " " *smart quotes* instead of the older, typewriter look of " " *straight quotes*. Likewise, Microsoft Word can be set to check that punctuation marks are set inside of closing quotation marks (as they most frequently should be).

TERMINOLOGY

What terms might people use to refer to the idea of quotation?

> They might use words or phrases such as *quote*, *quoting*, *direct quotation*, *putting in quotes*, or *using quotation marks*. They might incorrectly use the term *ditto marks* to refer to quotation marks.

> What it means *to quote* is that you are using words that were previously written or spoken, **exactly as they were originally written or spoken**. Or, you are copying exactly, a translation of how they were originally used. The words you are using are word-for-word … exactly the same as in your information source. A quote is not a paraphrase; a quote is not a summary; a quote is exact and unaltered (even if the information being quoted contains typographical or grammatical errors).

What are quotation marks?

> Quotation marks are punctuation. Quotation marks are always used in pairs; one to begin a quotation, the other to end a quotation. This use of quotation marks is also called opening and closing a quote. Enlarged view of the marks…

" " double quotation marks
' ' single quotation marks

> An opening quotation mark, shown just above, looks somewhat like the number 6.
> A closing quotation mark, shown above, looks somewhat like the number 9.
> Think of the curves of the quotation marks as wrapping around the quoted words.

> Example use of quotation marks:

> > In the motion picture, *The Wizard of Oz*, the character Dorothy
> >
> > Gale, played by actress Judy Garland, says to her dog, "Toto,
> >
> > I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

One more thing you should know—punctuation that looks like a quotation mark but is not a quotation mark. An *apostrophe* is punctuation typed with the same key on a computer keyboard as a single quotation mark. The apostrophe can be used to make words that are contractions, for example, the word *can't*. The apostrophe can also be used to type words that are possessive; words that show belonging to. For example, Li's book.

BASICS

All information sources, including quotes, must be documented. To *document* means to include citations in the body of the paper, and the corresponding reference or works cited entry at the end of the paper.

Quotations are placed in quotation marks.

The only time a direct quotation is not placed in quotation marks is when it a long quote. What is meant by *long* is defined by the style manual you are using for your writing. In cases of long quotes, the way you, the writer, present the quote in your research paper, is in what is termed a *block quotation*. Information about writing a block quotation is presented next.

Quotations are enclosed in double quotation marks.

The only time single quotation marks are used is to indicate a quote inside another quote.

> One of my favorite lines in literature comes from the novel *Moby Dick*
> by American author Herman Melville. He writes, "'Give way!' cried
> Ahab to the oarsmen, and the boats darted forward to the attack; but
> maddened by yesterday's fresh irons that corroded in him, Moby Dick
> seemed combinedly possessed by all the angels that fell from
> heaven" (ch. 135).

BLOCK QUOTATIONS

Long quotes are not placed in quotation marks; they are set off as block quotes.

The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* defines a long quote as forty words or more (171).

The *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (94) states that a quote should be presented as a block quote if it "…extends to more than four lines when run into the text…."

The presentation for block quotes varies between MLA and APA style. Each style has rules such as those for use when quoting just one paragraph, and for use when quoting more than one paragraph.

QUOTING *SECONDARY SOURCES* (also called INDIRECT SOURCES)

You have book *ABC*. You are reading book *ABC*. Book *ABC* includes a great quote (or even paraphrased material) from another information source—journal article *123*.

How do you quote the article *123* in your research paper?
How do you document the quotation from *123* in your research paper?

In other words, you want to cite *123*, but you do not have *123*; you only have *ABC*.

What you have is termed a *secondary source* or an *indirect source*. While it is always best to use original sources, this is not always possible. In some cases, it may be acceptable to use an indirect source—but it must be documented as such.

It is critical that you never write as if you have an information source that you do not actually have. To create a quotation or to otherwise imply that you directly used *123* as an information source is a lie. It is plagiarism. It is always academic dishonesty.

You may use indirect sources, but you must document your use of the information properly—indicating (using the proper documentation style) both the indirect source and the other information source—the one you actually had.

For instructions on how to use indirect sources:

In the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* defines, see section 6.17 on page 178.

In the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, see section 6.4.7 on page 226.

ADDITIONAL USE OF THE STYLE MANUALS

Always follow the writing style prescribed by your instructor. For American Psychological Association (APA) style, the guidebook is the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Sixth Edition. For Modern Language Association (MLA) style, use the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Seventh Edition.

In addition to showing the proper form of block quotations and using secondary/indirect sources—topics previously covered in this handout—style manuals help you address the following situations/answer questions such as:

- What to do if there is or appears to be a typographical or grammatical error in the material being quoted.
- What to do if additional information is needed to explain or clarify information within the quoted material.

- How do you indicate that you, the writer, have removed a portion of a sentence, or even an entire sentence, from the material being quoted?
- What are the circumstances in which you, the writer, may make minor changes to the information being quoted, e.g., change the case (upper-case/lowercase) of a letter that begins a quote, or change the closing punctuation?

OTHER USES OF QUOTATION MARKS

Quotation marks are used to indicate the titles of some types of information sources. For example, in the following MLA-style entry in a Works Cited list, the title of the journal article is placed in quotation marks.

Smith, Mark, et al. "Clinical Benefit and Preservation of Flavonols in

Dark Chocolate Manufacturing." *Nutrition Reviews* 66.11 (2008):

630-41. Print.

Other than quoting information sources and writing references/works cited lists for a research paper, you should almost never be using quotation marks in a college paper. The main exception would be if you were writing a work of literature, for example, a play.

Nevertheless, there are times in the course of writing (usually writing of a more casual nature than as in a college class) where quotation marks may be used. We don't want to tell you that there are no other uses for quotation marks, but we do want to stress that a research paper should not typically include language of this type, e.g., language that indicates irony or sarcasm.

Examples of how quotation marks are sometimes used in writing.

To indicate a nickname as part of a full name: Pete "Maverick" Mitchell is a character in the motion picture *Top Gun*.

To indicate a nonstandard use of a word: Anthony grabbed his "guitar;" it looked a lot like a tennis racket to me.

To indicate irony or sarcasm: When it came time to pay the bill, Jim told me he had "forgotten" to bring any money.

To indicate well-known sounds that aren't actual words: He tried to "Sssshh" me in my own library. When it is cold, I rub my hands together and say, "Brrr."

MISUSES OF QUOTATION MARKS

Misusing quotation marks is very common both in college writing and in everyday writing.

Never use single quotation marks unless it is for a quotation inside another quotation. This is a very common mistake. For college writing, in American English, there are no exceptions to this rule.

If you need to refer to a word or letter as a word or letter, use italics, not quotation marks:

Correct: When typing, I am careful not use the letter *O* when I should be using the numeral, zero.
Incorrect: When typing, I am careful not use the letter "O" when I should be using the numeral, zero.

College writing should rarely, if ever, include the use of quotation marks to indicate irony or an unusual use of a word. **In all forms of writing, use extreme caution when using quotation marks to add meaning to a word** … most of the time (virtually all of the time), it is not necessary. Never use quotation marks when the meaning of a word or phrase is known, even if the meaning is not literally what the words say.

Correct: Before you put quotes around a word, put on your thinking cap.
Incorrect: Before you put quotes around a word, put on your "thinking cap."

Correct: Authentic, Mexican food.
Incorrect: "Authentic," Mexican food.
Incorrect: Authentic, "Mexican" food.
Incorrect: Authentic, Mexican "food."

When you add quotation marks to a word or phrase, you change its meaning. If you say that you are serving authentic, Mexican "food;" by putting quotes around the word *food*, you are somehow indicating that it is something less or other than good-tasting food.

Correct: If it means what it says, do not add quotation marks.
Incorrect: If it "means" what it "says," do not add quotation "marks."

For a fun way to learn about how not to misuse quotation marks, see the appropriately named Web site, *the "blog" of "unnecessary" quotation marks,* online at http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/

TIPS FOR MICROSOFT WORD

Tip #1. In the United States, in all forms of writing (not just college writing), punctuation marks almost always go inside closing quotation marks. Word will help check that you are typing that correctly. In Word, look in the Word Options, then look under Proofing, then look for "When correcting spelling and grammar in Word," and select Settings. One of the choices is for "Punctuation required with quotes." For that choice, select *inside*.

Tip #2. Microsoft Word's proofreading tools do not check for pairs of punctuation marks such as parenthesis and quotation marks. When proofreading a research paper, you can check these by hand (by reading what you have written carefully and slowly), but you can also have Word help you. Control+F (hold down the control key and tap the letter *f*), is a Windows command to *find*. If you tell Word to find a quotation mark, it will show them to you one at a time; making it easier to spot them (to check if they are all in pairs). Caution! If you accidentally type a blank space before you type a close quote, Word will type it as an open quote. Look carefully.
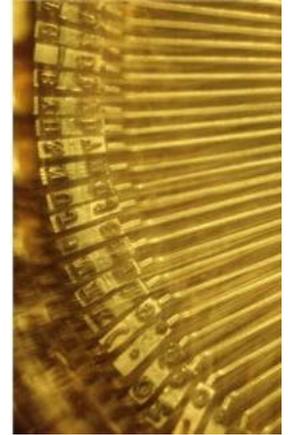
Tip #3. Formal publishing has long used curvy quotation marks that look like the numerals 6 and 9, but most mechanical typewriters were not built with these types of marks. Instead, most mechanical typewriters include straight marks, both in single and double formats. These straight or vertical marks are used by the typist as single or double quotation marks; as an apostrophe (the single mark); or as symbols for units of measurement—feet (the single mark)—and inches (the double mark).

Early word processing software continued this simplified use of single and double straight marks.

Contemporary word processing software, such as Microsoft Word, allows the user to choose between using straight quotes and what are termed *smart quotes* (the curly quotes seen in most books and journals). In Word, look in the Word Options, then look under Proofing, and finally, under Auto-Correct.

Straight quotes

"Toto, I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

Smart quotes (look more professional and modern than straight quotes)

"Toto, I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

The following are two examples of **MLA** style **citations**, written within the body of a paper.

> Weber (352) suggests that moving beyond "one's own environment begins with understanding how one fits into the social world."

> "Transcending one's own environment begins with understanding how one fits into the social world" Weber 352.

The following are two examples of **APA** style **citations**, written within the body of a paper.

> Weber (2010) introduces this concept by stating that "transcending one's own environment begins with understanding how one fits into the social world" p. 352.

> "Transcending one's own environment begins with understanding how one fits into the social world" (Weber, 2010, p. 352).

When writing in **MLA** style, the detailed list of information sources at the end of the paper is named a **Works Cited** list. The following is the entry in a works cited list for the information quoted, and cited, above.

> Weber, Christina D. "Literary Fiction as a Tool for Teaching Social Theory
>
> and Critical Consciousness." *Teaching Sociology* 38.4 (2010): 350-
>
> 61. *SAGE Journals Online.* Web. 15 June 2011.

When writing in **APA** style, the detailed list of information sources at the end of the paper is named a **Reference** list. The following is the reference for the information quoted, and cited, above.

> Weber, C. D. (2010). Literary fiction as a tool for teaching social theory
>
> and critical consciousness. *Teaching Sociology* *38*(4), 350-361.
>
> doi:10.1177/0092055X10378816