

# MLA Direct Quotations

## Style and Formatting Guide For Direct Quotations

The following information is an adapted version of the style and formatting guidelines found in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (2009), published by the Modern Language Association. This sheet is to serve as a ready-reference; more in-depth descriptions can be found in the handbook. Check with your professors to determine style and formatting preferences.

### WHY USE QUOTATIONS?

Use them to support your argument.

Use them to compare claims in multiple works for the purpose of analysis.

### WHEN SHOULD I USE THEM?

Use them to preserve the wording of the original author because

the author is an authority, or

the passage is well-phrased, vivid, or dramatic, or

the passage might be misinterpreted if expressed in other words.

### WHEN SHOULDN'T I USE THEM?

A general rule of thumb is that no more than fifteen percent of your paper should be quoted material. Therefore, when you can convey the idea just as effectively in your own words through the use of summary or paraphrase, do so. The purpose of using outside sources is to support your own ideas. "Source stringing" occurs when the amount of outside material is equal to or greater than your own original ideas.

## Integration

**Include an explanation for why you are using direct quotations in a paper. To increase readability or flow, you may include a linking sentence or phrase that introduces the quote, an author identification (within the text or a parenthetical citation), and an explanatory or interpretative sentence. For example:**

Frederick Douglass bases his identity as an American man on his rejection of the enslavement that began late in his own childhood; he viewed that period in life as his metaphorical birth. As a childhood slave, Douglass was denied the typical sources of identification that most other children are given. Maynard Mack explains this further in his introduction to the narrative: "Most children develop their sense of who they are by precisely the clues missing in Douglass's experience: age, parentage, such ritual occasions as birthdays ... Everything in Douglass's experience denies his lack of particularized identity" (725). Douglass's metaphorical birth occurs late in childhood, not only because of his rejection of slavery but also because of the absence of early childhood milestones.

**The author attribution (the author's name coupled with a signal word, such as "explains," or "says") can also be placed in the middle or at the end of a quotation. A linking sentence or phrase should remain and an explanatory sentence should still follow:**

Frederick Douglass bases his identity as an American man on his rejection of the enslavement that began late

in his own childhood; he viewed that period in life as his metaphorical birth. As a childhood slave, Douglass, was denied the typical sources of identification that most other children are given. “Most children develop their sense of who they are by precisely the clues missing in Douglass’s experience: age, parentage, such ritual occasions as birthdays,” explains Maynard Mack in his introduction to the narrative. “Everything in Douglass’s experience denies his lack of particularized identity” (725). Douglass’s metaphorical birth occurs late in childhood, not only because of his rejection of slavery but also because of the absence of early childhood milestones.

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## OR

Frederick Douglass bases his identity as an American man on his rejection of the enslavement that began late in his own childhood; he viewed that period in life as his metaphorical birth. As a childhood slave, Douglass was denied the typical sources of identification that most other children are given. “Most children develop their sense of who they are by precisely the clues missing in Douglass’s experience: age, parentage, such ritual occasions as birthdays...Everything in Douglass’s experience denies his lack of particularized identity,” Maynard Mack argues in his introduction to the narrative (725). Douglass’s metaphorical birth occurs late in childhood, not only because of his rejection of slavery but also because of the absence of early childhood milestones.

Note: The above information presents one way of integrating sources. All quotations should have material before and/or after them that relates them to the point of the paragraph in which they appear, but there are a variety of ways to present that material.

## Punctuation

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- Author attributions and linking phrases, when not complete sentences, are set off from the quotation by **commas**, as seen in the previous second and third examples (3.7.7).
- A **colon (:)** is usually used with a full-sentence linking phrase or author attribution to introduce long quotations, as seen in the first example and in the “Block Quotations” section (3.7.7).
- For short in-text quotations, **the period** always follows the parenthetical citation, as shown above (3.7.7).
- If the quoted sentence ends in a punctuation mark other than a period, such **as an exclamation or question mark**, that mark must be retained within the quotation (3.7.7). **A period** is placed after the citation.
- Block quotations are not set off by quotation marks and the citation is placed after the ending punctuation. Do not place a period after the citation of a block quote.

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## Block Quotations

Use block quotations when a quotation is four or more lines long. Indent each line of the quotation one inch from the left margin; do not change the right margin. Double-space the quotation. Do not use quotation marks, and place the parenthetical citation after the ending punctuation (3.7.2):

Cather vividly describes Jim's first thoughts on the Nebraska landscape in *My Antonia*:

I can remember exactly how the country looked to me as I walked beside my grandmother along the faint wagon-tracks on that early September morning. Perhaps the glide of long railway travel was still with me, for more than anything else I felt motion in the landscape; in the fresh, easy-blowing morning wind, and in the earth itself, as if the shaggy grass were a sort of loose hide, and underneath it herds of wild buffalo were galloping, galloping. (Cather 15)

## Quoting Indirect Sources

When you are quoting or citing a passage that was quoted or cited within the work of another scholar or writer (a secondary source), cite the passage as "quoted in." By crediting both the primary and secondary sources, the reader can easily locate the quoted passage, and you also protect yourself in case the original author was misquoted. When a writer's or a speaker's quoted words appear in a source written by someone else, begin the citation with the abbreviation "qtd. in." For example:

Fitzgerald describes the state of American fiction in his generation. "Ever since Irving's preoccupation with the necessity for an American background, for some miles of clear territory on which colorful variants might pleasantly arise, the question of material has hampered the American writer" (qtd. in Mallios 5).

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## Using Ellipses

Use an ellipsis when you omit portions of the original text being quoted. You might omit words from an original text to maintain the flow of the sentence containing the quotation and to avoid including parts of the text that are irrelevant to the topic (3.7.5).

Place three periods where words, phrases, or sentences have been omitted. For example, if "though" were removed from the following excerpt, the change would appear as shown:

- **Source:** "What's missing, though, are the fundamentals—a grasp of the story's subtext and a genuine sense of terror—and without these, the rest is essentially meaningless."
- **Quotation:** *The Washington Post*'s Hal Hinson writes, "What's missing . . . are the fundamentals—a grasp of the story's subtext and a genuine sense of terror—and without these, the rest is essentially meaningless" (1).

If you use the ellipsis to show that the last part of a sentence has been removed, add the three dots to the period, making a total of four, as follows:

I had lived in an earlier time. So there is no going back. At the same time, the creators of technology often do not seem to be as concerned about the effects of their work as outsiders think they ought to be.

- **Quotation:** When asked about the motives and goals behind his texts, Crichton has said, “We are, as a society, tremendously dependent on science and technology . . . . At the same time, the creators of technology often do not seem to be as concerned about the effects of their work as outsiders think they ought to be” (3).

**If the author of the original source uses an ellipsis, use square brackets around the ellipses to distinguish them from the original source’s ellipses:**

- **Source:** The wagon went on, the store with its quiet crowd of grimly watching men dropped behind; a curve in the road hid it. *Forever* he thought. *Maybe he’s done satisfied now, now that he has . . .* Stopping himself, not to say it aloud even to himself. His mother’s hand touched his shoulder.
- **Quotation:** Snopes wonders, “*Forever [ . . . ]. Maybe he’s done satisfied now, now that he has . . .*” but stops himself as his mother attempts to comfort him (Faulkner 2073).

Note: An ellipsis is not needed for paraphrases or summaries, nor is it required at the beginning or end of quotations.

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