

Using Quotations Effectively

When you write a paper, relevant quotes can help you support your argument. You'll want to use a direct quote

- when a source's wording or phrasing is so distinctive that a summary or paraphrase would diminish its impact
- when a source's words—particularly those of a recognized expert on your subject—will lend authority to your argument
- when an author's words are so concise that paraphrasing would make it less clear or less impactful
- when a paraphrase would change the meaning of the original quote
- when you expect to disagree with a source, because using a source's exact words assures readers you are being fair

You should not just drop quotes, summaries and paraphrases into your paper. Instead, you should anchor them into your own commentary. Then you have to add analysis to increase the coherence and to show why you have used each quote. In this handout, we'll show you how to do just that.

Using Quotes of an Appropriate Length

Many professors see long passages as the student's attempt to "pad" a paper without really analyzing the information. An argumentative paper is just as much about your ability to adequately explain *why* you interpret the argument as you do as it is about providing support for your argument.

Do your best to use short snippets of quotes rather than including long passages. Including long passages means your reader is doing most of the work because the reader has to figure out why you included this passage. As the writer, you must explain why this quote is relevant to your argument. If you find yourself thinking "they'll know what I mean," you're dead wrong. It's your job as the writer to explain exactly why you've used that quote and how it relates to your argument.

Realize that you may not end up using all the quotes you gather. This is just a natural part of the process. Choose the best, most substantial and authoritative quotes that you find. If you cannot choose, try to rank the information from the best to the least convincing, and then use the top three quotes.

Citing Your Sources

Of course, you'll need to properly cite the sources for your quotes. The way you do it is dependent on the style guide you're supposed to use for this assignment. Make sure you've asked your professor which style guide is appropriate for your paper. In this handout, we use MLA format.

Another thing to keep in mind—when in doubt, cite your source. Many professors use websites like TurnItIn.com, which make it easy to spot plagiarism. If the words you put in your paper aren't your own, cite your source, even if you've tried to paraphrase instead of including direct quotes.

Anchoring Quotes into Your Sentences

You might be tempted to just cut and paste quotes into your paper. However, quotes cannot stand alone. A college-level writer finds a way to incorporate quotes into a sentence of his or her own commentary, which anchors the quote. Anchoring quotes into your own sentences is a more sophisticated technique that makes you a more masterful writer. We'll talk more about this technique in a moment.

For the purposes of this handout, let's pretend that you're writing about musician Taylor Swift as an ideal role model for young women. You've found lots of information to support this idea, and you want to incorporate that information into your paper to justify your stance.

Here's the opening paragraph for your essay "Swift-ly Becoming a Role Model":

Taylor Swift has become famous for creating songs about her life. These songs seem to reflect the experiences of many young women, and an increasingly large number of these young women see Swift as an empowering role model. Through her songs, we can see many references to gender and gender roles, which form a statement about her opinion on the role of females in the 21st century. In particular, her songs "22" and "Shake It Off" indicate that all the experiences of young womanhood are valid. Her deft lyrics and business savvy have made Swift into a new icon of feminine empowerment.

You found some particularly good quotes in an article from *Time* magazine, including these:

"They're discovering the music that tells them how they are going to live their lives and how they should feel and how it's acceptable to feel," Swift says. "I think that that's kind of exciting."

The old Swift rarely explored gray areas. Yet, she says, "when you're growing up and essentially publishing your diary for the world to read, you end up incorporating new themes as these themes become evident to you in your own life."

From them, Swift says, she has enjoyed "extreme, unconditional, wonderful loyalty that I never thought I'd receive in my life, not from a best friend, not from a boyfriend, not from a husband, not from a dog."

But up on the roof, Swift's fans shimmied and shivered, anything to ward off the evening's chill, as they gazed up at their queen while she looked out over her new, vast kingdom.



You also really like these lyrics from the two songs you're writing about:

From "Shake It Off":

I'm dancing on my own
I make the moves as I go
And that's what they don't know
That's what they don't know
But I keep cruising
Can't stop, won't stop grooving
It's like I got this music
In my mind, saying it's gonna be alright

You'd like to make use of these lines from "22":

We're happy, free, confused, and lonely in the best way
It's miserable and magical.
Oh, yeah
Tonight's the night when we forget about the heartbreaks
It's time

Let's anchor some of these quotes by incorporating snippets from them into a sentence of our own commentary:

For many of her legions of fans, Swift's lyrics express how they feel about maturing. In particular, the song "Shake It Off" evidences Swift's willingness to take life as it comes. In the song, Swift sings, "I'm dancing on my own / I make the moves as I go." These lyrics seem to indicate Swift's awareness that part of the journey of maturity is taking things as they come. While it is possible to view the line "I got this music / In my mind, saying it's gonna be alright" as a lack of perception about experience, it is equally possible to see it as Swift's attempt to put a positive spin on experience. The real message seems to be that no matter what happens, we can look at it in a positive light. We do not need to know everything that is going to happen because the unscripted parts of life often bring us the most wisdom.

In his article "The Power of Taylor Swift," Jack Dickey notes Swift's ability to mirror her fans' experiences: "They're discovering the music that tells them how they are going to live their lives and how they should feel and how it's acceptable to feel," Swift says. "I think that that's kind of exciting." It is obvious that Swift is aware of her audience and that she writes directly to them. She has said, "when you're growing up and essentially publishing your diary for the world to read, you end up incorporating new themes as these themes become evident to you in your own life." Her willingness to reveal her mistakes and inconsistencies have directly contributed to her popularity because her fans see her as "one of us."

It's just that easy. Now we've anchored the quotes into our own commentary, which is a much more sophisticated technique than simply placing quotes in our paper where they'll just float around. You've distinguished yourself as a writer who truly understands how to use supporting evidence effectively. As you write, try to vary the placement of the identifying phrase. You can put it at the end or the middle, as well as at the beginning. You can also use a running acknowledgment, like "As so-and-so points out, . . ." and then continue with the quoted information.



Make sure to acknowledge any changes you make in a quote by putting them in brackets [brackets look like this]. You might need to do this to make the verb tenses consistent, to change a capital letter to a lower case one (or vice versa), or to supply an antecedent for a pronoun. Do not misrepresent quoted material by deleting words or phrases that alter the original meaning.

Explaining How the Quote Relates to Your Paper

Comment on each quote you use immediately after you include it. Explain why it's important. Don't just expect your reader to see how the quote fits in—go the distance for your reader and tell him or her how *you* think this quote fits into your paper. If you need more than one sentence of explanation, that's fine. Do what it takes to flesh out your idea so your reader understands precisely what you mean. That's your job as the writer. This type of critical thinking is one of the reasons your professors have you write papers in the first place.

Your argument must be logical, sincere, and informed. Treat your readers like intelligent, reasonable adults, and explain to them precisely why they should see things your way and exactly how the quoted information supports your argument.

Works Cited

Dickey, Jack. "The Power of Taylor Swift." *Time Magazine*. New York: 24 Nov. 2014. Web. 28 June 2015.

Swift, Taylor and Max Martin, et al. "22." From "Red." Sony/ATC Music Publishing LLC, Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., 2012. CD. Web. 28 June 2015.

Swift, Taylor and Max Martin, et al. "Shake It Off." From "1989." Sony/ATC Music Publishing LLC, Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., 2014. CD. Web. 28 June 2015.

