

Using quotations – sparingly!

Quoting: using other people's exact words

When you use the exact words that someone else has written, you must put them in quotation marks in your text. In name/date referencing systems, like Harvard, you must give the page number in the text as well, for example: *Many people imagine that really good writers sit down, think hard about what they are going to write and then produce it in one single, nearly perfect draft: what Elbow refers to as "magical... cooking in their heads" (1981, p.45). However, as he points out, this is, in fact, a very rare gift and a very risky strategy for most writers.*

Longer quotations (generally three lines or more) are usually put in a separate, indented paragraph without any quotation marks. The author, year and page number must be given.

Make quoting the exception

Using quotations should be the exception unless your focus is a detailed analysis of the text itself (in a literature assignment, for example). When you do quote, use only what you absolutely need and, wherever possible, incorporate it into your own sentence.

Have a specific reason for quoting

For example:

- When you are using someone's definition / interpretation of a term or concept
- When someone has phrased something particularly memorably or effectively
- When you wish to discuss or highlight the exact words that have been used
- When you want to give a very detailed analysis or critique
- When the precise detail / language is important, e.g. an official document

Why?

What is important in our own writing is what **we** have to say. Too much quotation is distracting: our writing becomes a jumble of different voices, which drowns out our voice and the message we want to put across. An essay with a lot of quotation tends to lack clear focus and direction because the writer is not shaping her own text and telling the reader what is going on.

We incorporate the work of others into our writing because we are **using** it in some way (as evidence or examples; to give context or background; to discuss, evaluate or analyse what someone has done; to show where our information has come from; to show what has influenced our thinking..). Therefore, to make our message coherent and to show how these references fit into our line of thinking, we need to take control of them, which often means synthesising the content into our own words. **But still CITE IN YOUR TEXT ever y time you use / refer to someone else's work.**

Reference: Elbow, P.(1981) *Writing with power*. New York: Oxford University Press.