Tips for Modifying Quotes

Skilled writers improve the flow of their essays by modifying quotes to fit into their own sentence structure. This also helps writers control what the reader focuses on.

You can:
1. Shorten quotes
2. Clarify the meaning of quotes by adding your own words
3. Mix your paraphrases and snippets of a direct quote in the same sentence

1. Shorten long quotes with ellipses

> ellipses …

You can shorten quotes by removing words from the middle of the quote and adding ellipses to indicate that you have removed some words. Shortening quotes helps the reader focus on the key information. You can remove words that are redundant or irrelevant to the point you are making.

> Note: For APA, do not include ellipses at the beginning or end of quotes, just for content you remove from the middle of the quotation.

Example:

Original: *"*If kids grow kale, kids eat kale~~. If they grow tomatoes, they eat tomatoes. But when none of this is presented to them,~~ if they're not shown how food affects the mind and the body, they blindly eat whatever you put in front of them" (Finely, 2018).

Shortened with ellipses: *"*If kids grow kale, kids eat kale … if they're not shown how food affects the mind and the body, they blindly eat whatever you put in front of them" (Finely, 2018).

2. Clarify Quotes with Brackets

> brackets [ ]

Sometimes when you pull a sentence out of a larger text, you will need to add words or phrases for the quote to make sense to the reader. Place brackets around any words you add to clarify. The brackets might replace unclear words (e.g. *it, them, this, they*) or add context to the quote. Brackets tell the reader that you have added your own words, but have not changed the meaning of the original quote.

Example #1: *Replacing a word for clarity*
Original: "Just 3% of **its** population is working poor and a mere 3.3% is dependent on some form of social welfare" (Womak, 2016, p. 27).

> Your reader might not know what country "its" is referring to. Add the country in brackets.

Clarified with brackets: "Just 3% of **[Switzerland's]** population is working poor and a mere 3.3% is dependent on some form of social welfare" (Womak, 2016, p. 27).

Example #2: *Adding a phrase for clarity*
Original: "An even starker shift took place with carbonated soft drinks; sales in Latin America have doubled since 2000" (Jacobs & Richell, 2017).

Clarified: "An even starker shift **[in dietary habits]** took place with carbonated soft drinks; sales in Latin America have doubled since 2000" (Jacobs & Richell, 2017).

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3. Mix your own words and snippets of quotes in the same sentence

You don't have to choose between quoting or paraphrasing a section of text. Instead, you can blend a paraphrase (your own words) with a direct quote (the author's exact words). Integrating snippets of quotes into your own sentence structure can make your writing smoother. Use quotation marks around the words of others and don't forget to cite.

Example #1: *Keep memorable phrases from the original in quotation marks*

Often quotes have a phrase that is eloquent or descriptive that you will want to quote. This doesn't mean, though, that you have to quote the entire sentence. You can mostly paraphrase and then directly quote just the short phrase that you found eloquent.

Original quote:

"Whatever symbols they embraced, civil-rights activists—much like black activists today—never successfully connected with the hearts of the majority of adults of their own day … but the activists did **sketch a theater of violence**, with men like Bull Connor in starring roles, that shamed and **embarrassed the country**" Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Atlantic*

Cite at the beginning of your paraphrase

Paraphrase and part of a quote mixed together:

Coates (2018) argued that protests surrounding racial injustice were historically divisive and have continued to be unpopular with the masses. However, unlike modern activists, civil-rights activists were able to **"sketch a theater of violence"** which **"embarrassed the country"** and promoted social change (para. 12).

Example #2: *Remove "I" language from quotes*

For quotes with "I" language, you can choose snippets of the quote and paraphrase the rest. You can also give more context to the reader.

Original quote:

"That's really the most idiotic suggestion of all time. I don't believe players should be paid. I believe they are getting a tremendous opportunity." Jim Boeheim, basketball coach

Paraphrase and part of a quote mixed together:

Boeheim argued that since college student-athletes are given "**a tremendous opportunity**" to study at top universities, the proposal to offer them salaries is **"idiotic"** (as cited in Weiner, 2014).

Example #3: *Quote just the statistic*

You may want to quote a statistic from a source, but paraphrase the surrounding information.

Original quote:

"If the Syracuse men's basketball team makes it to the 2014 NCAA Finals, its players will miss an estimated 17 days of classes, or 24.2% of the spring semester. That arguably reduces the value of their 'free' education." Marc Edelman, *Forbes*

Paraphrase and statistic from a source mixed together:

Edelman (2014) asserts that when student athletes are required to prioritize athletics over classes they are not getting the education they are promised; this is especially true for basketball players at the University of Syracuse who may miss "**24.2% of the spring semester**" (para. 2).