

Quotidian Concerns: Quoting and Paraphrasing

Use quotations when the exact wording of a source will add to your argument, and/or the reader's understanding of the source. In history writing, most quotes will come from primary sources. Historians avoid quoting extensively from secondary sources except in reviews, critiques, and historiographies. For both primary and secondary sources, historians prefer to paraphrase, which will help the writing flow better by keeping the paper in your own voice. Paraphrasing will also demonstrate that you fully understand the material!

As an example, we'll use a sentence from Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers*.

Block Quotes

You can incorporate a quotation into your text in one of two ways, depending on its length. If the quotation is four lines or less, run it into your text and enclose it in quotation marks. If it is five lines or longer, set it off as a block quote, without quotation marks. Follow the same principals for quotations within footnotes or endnotes.¹

Block quotes are set aside visually from the rest of the text by a left indentation. They can be useful in research papers to introduce a primary source that you will discuss at length. However, they are also easy to skip. Consequently, many readers will. Most of the time, block quotes are unnecessary.

How to Break Down Quotations

There are several ways to break down a long, cumbersome, wordy, overcrowded, distracting quotation.

Use ellipses: Readers appreciate it when a quote gets right to the point. To slim down a quotation, use ellipses (...) to mark text that you have removed: According to Turabian, "You can incorporate a quotation into your text in one of two ways...If the quotation is four lines or less, run it into your text and enclose it in quotation marks. If it is five lines or longer, set it off as a block quote..."

Provide context: The quote can also be broken up using contextual information. "You can incorporate a quotation into your text in one of two ways," writes Turabian. "If the quotation is four lines or less, run it into your text and enclose it in quotation marks. If it is five lines or longer, set it off as a block quote..."

¹ Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 8th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 347.

Modify the quote: But wait! Who is this ‘you’? When taking a quote out of context, writers may need to change an element of grammar (usually pronouns or tenses) to make it fit, or add clarification. To do this, use brackets: Turabian tells us that “[The writer] can incorporate a quotation into [their] text in one of two ways...”

It’s starting to look clunky though, isn’t it? Wouldn’t it be better to use a select portion of the quote and paraphrase the rest? (“Yes! It would!” the reader cries.)

Select important words or phrases: According to Turabian, writers can choose “one of two ways” to include quotations in their texts. For shorter quotes of four lines or less, they should use quotation marks, but for longer quotes it is more appropriate to “set [them] off” as block quotes.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is, quite simply, putting what you’ve read into your own words.

According to Turabian, writers have two options for including quotations in their texts. For shorter quotes of four lines or less, they should use quotation marks, but for longer quotes it is more appropriate to use block quotes.²

The above is a paraphrased version of the original block quote. Note that a citation is still used at the end of the paraphrased sentence, just as with with a direct quote. In this way you can support the paper with another’s ideas, without losing your own voice. “Hoorah!”

Factual information, narrative, or theory should almost always be paraphrased. Save quotes for moments when you can’t capture the essence of a source through paraphrasing, and you cannot make your point without it.

Quoting secondary sources

Sometimes quotes can be used to convey the tone of a source. For example, if you’re reading a work by a scholar who calls the French Revolution a “a minor footnote to the American Revolution” that is worth quoting because it reveals that scholar’s attitude and approach toward a historical event.

We hope you find these tips helpful next time you need to “break down...long [and] distracting quotation[s]”!

² Ibid.