

## Using Quotations

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**You have two main choices for how to use quotations: to provide textual detail, and to offer analysis.** Effective papers use a combination of both of these strategies; they are based in analysis of quotations, but quote to offer details for “texture” where appropriate.

### Quotations for Textual Detail

**Using quotations to provide textual detail allows you to paraphrase without getting too far away from the text itself.** Pragmatically, textual details will confirm for your reader that you did, indeed, read the same work of literature even though you may have come up with something your reader never, ever would have thought of. You confirm you read the same text by referencing the explicit, identifying content of the work.

**Quotes used for textual detail are always short, and occur in the midst of paraphrase.** Providing texture makes the task of paraphrasing easier, because it means you don’t have to find a new way of saying every word in the original passage.

**Example 1:** Alberta’s aversion to the way relationships “rumble on progressively” in a predictable series of events leads her to consider a variety of alternatives to marriage when it comes to having children (46).

**Example 2:** Believing that “two is the safest number” when it comes to romantic relationships (46), Alberta switches her attention from Lionel to Charlie or Charlie to Lionel whenever things begin to feel too serious.

### Quotations for Analysis

**Quotation analysis, also called “close-reading,” is the foundation of well-written papers about literature.** Analyzing quotations in your writing will allow you to give specific, complex interpretations of passages from a novel. Papers that don’t analyze quotations always end up feeling superficial – they skim the surface of the book, paraphrasing the plot, describing the characters, etc., and sometimes they leap from these descriptions to the writer’s opinions, but they rarely offer interpretations of particular moments in the text.

**When you analyze quotations, you focus not only on what gets said, but how it gets said.** Instead of letting the quotation speak for itself, you give sustained attention to the language and meaning of the quotation.

**Analyzing quotations is a complex skill, and we will spend the next several classes learning the steps that analysis entails.** For now, we’ll focus on conventions for using quotations in sentences.

## Framing Quotations in Sentences

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Let's say you want to quote from the following passage from *Green Grass, Running Water* in a piece of your own writing:

But having both Lionel and Charlie relieved her of the anxiety of a single relationship in which events were supposed to rumble on progressively, through well-defined stages. First dates, long talks, simple passion, necking, petting, sex, serious conversations, commitment, and the brief stops along the line to marriage and beyond. Alberta had just gotten beyond sex with both men before derailing the locomotive on a grassy shoulder of pleasant companionship and periodic intercourse. Some women would have seen two men as an embarrassment of riches. But Alberta knew that apart from no men in her life, two was the safest number. (46)

**1. Cut the quote down to its most crucial portion.** What qualifies as the “most crucial” portion will depend on the way you want to use the quote.

For instance, if I want to make a point about the standard narratives of relationships, I might choose this portion:

events were supposed to rumble on progressively, through well-defined stages. First dates, long talks, simple passion, necking, petting, sex, serious conversations, commitment, and the brief stops along the line to marriage and beyond.

But if I want to examine the locomotive metaphor or talk about the current state of Alberta's love life, I might choose this portion:

Alberta had just gotten beyond sex with both men before derailing the locomotive on a grassy shoulder of pleasant companionship and periodic intercourse.

**2. “Frame” the quote in a grammatically complete sentence of your own.** In other words, your sentence should be grammatically correct even if the quotations were removed.

\* If the quote you've chosen is already a grammatically complete sentence, you still need to frame it with a few of your own words:

In keeping with the “moving train” metaphor of the paragraph, the narrative summarizes Alberta's current romantic life by noting that, “Alberta had just gotten beyond sex with both men before derailing the locomotive on a grassy shoulder of pleasant companionship and periodic intercourse” (46).

\* Framing a quotation in a sentence often involves some amount of paraphrase to provide context:

Alberta is weary of the predictable trajectory of a relationship that progresses through the “well-defined stages” of “first dates, long talks, simple passion, necking, petting, sex, serious conversations, commitment, and the brief stops along the line to marriage and beyond” (46).

\* If you need to change the tense of the verb, or be more specific about a pronoun, put your changes in brackets (remember to use the “literary present” when talking about the events in a novel):

Alberta finds it tedious that, in relationships, “events [are] supposed to rumble on progressively, through well-defined stages” (46).

\* If you want to use sections of a sentence that are not continuous, you need to put an ellipsis where you deleted the text:

For Alberta, “having both Lionel and Charlie relieve[s] her of the anxiety of a single relationship in which events...rumble on progressively, through well-defined stages.” (46).

\* If you are quoting dialogue that is already in quotations in the original text, and you are only quoting the quoted text, be clear in your “frame” that you’re quoting a line of dialogue and punctuate normally:

When the Lone Ranger begins reciting the Book of Genesis, Ishmael interjects, “That’s the wrong story...That story comes later” (11).

\* If you are quoting a combination of unquoted and quoted text, the original quotations will become single quotations. This is true even if the quotation ends the sentence:

Hawkeye reminds the Lone Ranger to get the story right, “‘And,’ [says] Robinson Crusoe, ‘you can’t tell it all by yourself’” (11).

## MLA In-Text Citation

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Whether you paraphrase or quote, you need to cite the author and the page number of the passage you're referring to in the text of your paper. Here's how you do it.

### Short Quotations (less than four lines):

To indicate short quotations, put quotation marks around the quoted material. Then include the author's last name and the page number in parentheses, after the final quotation mark. Punctuation marks (periods, commas, semi-colons) come outside the quotation marks, after the parenthetical citation:

In keeping with the "moving train" metaphor of the paragraph, the narrative summarizes Alberta's current romantic life by noting that, "Alberta had just gotten beyond sex with both men before derailing the locomotive on a grassy shoulder of pleasant companionship and periodic intercourse" (King 46).

If the author's name has already appeared in a parenthetical citation and you are continuing to cite from the same author, just include the page number (and make sure to include the author's name if you switch texts later).

### Long Quotations (more than four lines):

Long quotations should be used sparingly. Often a short, specific quotation surrounded by paraphrase is more effective than a long quotation, because it directs your reader to the exact spot in the text that you're interested in examining.

If you need to quote a longer passage, place the quoted material in a free-standing block of text, without quotation marks, indented an inch from the left margin. The whole quote should be double-spaced. Your parenthetical citation should come after the closing punctuation mark:

Alberta finds it tedious that, in relationships:  
events [are] supposed to rumble on progressively, through well-defined stages. First dates, long talks, simple passion, necking, petting, sex, serious conversations, commitment, and the brief stops along the line to marriage and beyond. Alberta had just gotten beyond sex with both men before derailing the locomotive on a grassy shoulder of pleasant companionship and periodic intercourse. (46)

\* If the quotation comes early in the sentence, put the citation at the first natural breaking point (often this comes directly after the quotation):

When the Lone Ranger begins reciting the Book of Genesis, Ishmael interjects, "That's the wrong story...That story comes later" (11), and in the next section the Lone Ranger begins with the ceremonial opening for a Cherokee story.

## Common Problems with Quotation

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**Accidental Plagiarism** (strings of words are borrowed from the original without quotation marks around them):

Having both Lionel and Charlie kept Alberta from feeling the anxiety of a single relationship in which events were supposed to go through typical well-defined stages, such as first dates, long talks, simple passion, necking, petting, sex, serious conversations, commitment, and eventually marriage.

**Excessive Quote** (the quote used is much longer than necessary):

Alberta believes that “having both Lionel and Charlie relieved her of the anxiety of a single relationship in which events were supposed to rumble on progressively, through well-defined stages. First dates, long talks, simple passion, necking, petting, sex, serious conversations, commitment, and the brief stops along the line to marriage and beyond. Alberta had just gotten beyond sex with both men before derailing the locomotive on a grassy shoulder of pleasant companionship and periodic intercourse” (46).

**Irrelevant Quote** (the specific words quoted are not important):

“But having both Lionel and Charlie” makes Alberta feel much safer about her romantic life (46).

**Lonely Quote** (the quote is not part of a sentence):

Alberta is anxious about getting caught up in a standard progression of relationship events. “Alberta had just gotten beyond sex with both men before derailing the locomotive on a grassy shoulder of pleasant companionship and periodic intercourse” (46).

**Ungrammatical Quote** (the quote interferes with the grammar of the sentence):

Alberta finds the standard trajectory of a romantic relationship tedious, “First dates, long talks, simple passion, necking, petting, sex, serious conversations, commitment, and the brief stops along the line to marriage and beyond” (46).

**MLA Mix-Ups** (the punctuation is in the wrong order or the page number is omitted):

In keeping with the “moving train” metaphor of the paragraph, the narrative summarizes Alberta’s current romantic life by noting that, “Alberta had just gotten beyond sex with both men before derailing the locomotive on a grassy shoulder of pleasant companionship and periodic intercourse.” (46)