

Quotes in an Essay (The Blue Sheet)

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If you quote, paraphrase or otherwise use a specific passage from a book, an article, or another work, give the relevant page or section/paragraph number or numbers. When the author's name is in your text, give only the number reference in parenthesis, but if the context does not clearly identify the author, add the author's last name before the reference. Leave a space between them, but do not insert punctuation: (Johnson 314). Do not use the word for the page in the parenthetical identification in any form: page / pages / p. / pp.

If your source uses explicit paragraph numbers rather than page number—as, for example, some electronic publications do—give the relevant number or numbers preceded by the abbreviation par. or pars.

If you write about only one piece of literature, you do not need to reference the author's name continuously. With only one work in the essay, the author's identity will be clear.

If the quote begins on one page and ends on the next, provide both pages with a hyphen between; however, do not repeat any number beyond the ten's column. A quote on page 117 that continues on page 118 would be referenced like this: (117-18).

If you use two quotes in a single sentence that come from different pages, provide the page numbers with a comma between them in the same order as the quotes show up in your sentence: (117, 115).

When you pull several quotes from a single page of a source and present them in immediate succession within the same paragraph of your essay, you may provide the page number at the end of the last quote and refrain from the constant reference to that same page number throughout the paragraph.

Examples of single quotes in an essay taken directly from the MLA handbook:

1. Although writings describing utopia have always seemed to take place far from the everyday world, in fact "all utopian fiction whirls contemporary actors through a costume dance no place else but here" (Robinson 3879).
2. Between 1968 and 1988, television coverage of presidential elections has changed dramatically (Hallin 5).
3. The cluster on literacy in the anthology by Lauter and his coeditors is a resource for teaching the place of oral cultures in postbellum America (155-66).
4. Litvak calls Winters's mumbling a "labor of disarticulation" (167).
5. Chan claims that "Eagleton has belittled the gains of postmodernism" (par. 41).
6. Adding a page number – Chan claims that "Eagleton has belittled the gains of postmodernism" (279; par. 41).
7. Adding author's name – "Eagleton has belittled the gains of postmodernism" (Chan 279; par. 41).
8. Adding authors' names and page numbers – "Dr. Gordon is certainly an injurious patriarchic figure," whose superficiality does little to ensure that Esther's life would not "slide out of control" (Tsank 167; Battersby 17).

WHERE TO PUT THE PUNCTUATION

To avoid interrupting the flow of your writing, place the parenthetical reference where a pause would naturally occur (preferably at the end of a sentence), as near as possible to the material documented. The parenthetical reference precedes the punctuation mark that concludes the sentence, clause, or phrase containing the borrowed material. (*MLA* 6.3)

This means that you should generally place the parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence (as in the examples 1-8). But if that placement would cause any doubt about what the citation refers to, the citation should be placed earlier in the sentence, where a pause occurs.

The latter situation often arises when there is an idea of the essayist's between the end of the quotation and the end of the sentence. If the citation is then placed at the end of the sentence, the reader will mistakenly think that the essayist's idea comes from the same source as the quotation. In such a case, the citation should be moved up, so it comes between the quotation and the essayist's idea. The punctuation would then follow the citation.

Examples:

6. “A poignancy of remembrance swept over Jeanie” (312), after her husband’s death.

The unquoted part of the above sentence obviously comes from the essayist but does not present a view, so the page number should be at the end of the sentence. Notice the punctuation in the revised sentence below.

7. “A poignancy of remembrance swept over Jeanie,” after her husband’s death (312).

Below exemplifies integration of sources from two different works, from the MLA handbook.

8. In the late Renaissance, Machiavelli contended that human beings were by nature “ungrateful” and “mutable” (1240), and Montaigne thought them “miserable and puny” (1343).

Notice the following about #8:

There are no author names inside the source references because the names have been established in the sentence. Repeating them would be redundant.

The comma, which would naturally follow “mutable,” actually follows the page number. Page numbers belong to the quotes. Usually, commas and periods go inside quotation marks; semicolons and colons go outside.

The punctuation follows standard guidelines when quotes are chunked and embedded in the essayist’s sentence. There would be a comma after the word “mutable” without the quotation marks; therefore, there must be a comma despite the quotation marks. Additionally, that comma will follow the page number reference because that page number belongs to the quote.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU QUOTE SOMEONE WHO QUOTED SOMEONE ELSE?

Add “qtd. in” and the last name and page number of the source where you found the quote or idea. If you quote Smith from Jones, Smith will not be listed on your works cited page; therefore, you must create a clear pathway for your reader to find Smith.

Example:

9. Joseph Brodsky, a 1987 Nobel Prize winner, eloquently describes books as “a means of transportation through the space of experience, at the speed of turning a page,” which reveals his appreciation for the power of literature while also exemplifying his mastery of the craft (qtd. in Jago 23).

Notice in Example #9 that the analysis following the passage could be thought to have come from Jago. In order to clarify that the idea belongs to the essayist, the writer should move up the source reference. Notice the adjustment of the punctuation in the revision below:

10. Joseph Brodsky, a 1987 Nobel Prize winner, eloquently describes books as “a means of transportation through the space of experience, at the speed of turning a page” (qtd. in Jago 23), which reveals his appreciation for the power of literature while also exemplifying his mastery of the craft.

If you do not include the author’s name in your context, do this:

11. He eloquently describes books as “a means of transportation through the space of experience, at the speed of turning a page” (Brodsky qtd. in Jago 23), which reveals his appreciation for the power of literature while also exemplifying his mastery of the craft.