

LUC WRITING CENTER – “HOW TO FRAME A QUOTATION”

Quotations from primary or secondary sources are common features of academic essays, especially research papers. Knowing how to properly cite a quote (for instance, in MLA or APA format) is an important step in ensuring that you’re avoiding plagiarism and giving credit to the authors of the texts you’re using. There is much more to effective quote usage than proper citations, however.

Guidelines for Quote Usage:

Where should you place the quotes in your essay? What should you write before and after them? How should you integrate a quote into a sentence? These are stylistic choices that depend partially on the genre of the essay you’re writing and the type of quote you’re using. The following suggestions apply specifically to the use of primary and secondary sources in academic research papers, but they are good rules to keep in mind whenever you need to use a quote in an essay.

- 1) **Avoid starting or ending a paragraph with a quote.** In a research paper, you should ideally reference a variety of secondary sources that offer differing perspectives on your topic. It’s important to always keep in mind, however, that this is **your** argument, and your voice should always carry authority. To begin or end a paragraph with a quote is to cede an important location in your paper to someone else’s voice. This can distract the reader from your argument, detract from the authority of your voice, and prevent you from framing the quote with an effective introduction and analysis.
- 2) **Don’t let a quote stand alone in a sentence.** Introduce the author and text before giving the quote if it’s the first time you’re citing this text; if you’re referring to the same text at multiple points in the paper, you don’t need to formally introduce it every time, but you should still make sure that the quote is integrated verbally into the sentence it appears in (see example on the following page).
- 3) It shouldn’t be your reader’s responsibility to figure out how a quote relates to your thesis. **Follow every quote with an analysis of its content and its relation to your argument.** The depth and length of your analysis can vary depending on the nature of the quote – some quotes will be complex and require extensive analysis, while others will be more transparent and will, to an extent, speak for themselves.
- 4) *How much of a research paper should be dedicated to quotes?* This is a difficult question to answer, as there’s no universally-accepted percentage. Generally, though, you should **keep your quotes as concise and pointed as possible.** You should try not to quote more than once or twice in a paragraph. In an 8-10 page research paper, you will likely have a few block quotes consisting of several sentences, but try to keep these to a minimum.

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Example:

Below is a three-paragraph excerpt from an essay on Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway. It includes quotes from a secondary source (the article by Scott Cohen) and a primary source (Mrs. Dalloway). Note (and critique) the way that the author introduces these quotes and then engages with them afterwards. Are the quotes integrated into the author’s argument? Does the author devote enough space to analyzing them? Are the quotes relevant and concise?

Critics of *Mrs. Dalloway* frequently discuss Peter Walsh’s walk through London. Scott Cohen, for instance, views Peter’s walk as a subtle criticism of British imperialism; as Peter passes by or through architectural monuments to the British Empire, such as Trafalgar Square, he persistently ignores them. **According to Cohen, this “undercut[s] the monumental formations of empire in metropolitan London, making a potentially ideologically controlled landscape open to contestation and invention” (101).** By fixing his attention on the girl he is pursuing, Peter’s fantasy of interpersonal connection distracts him from the fixed imperial monuments surrounding him. Peter, therefore, unconsciously rejects these monuments and the political practices they valorize.

This reading nicely connects Peter’s walk to Woolf’s tendency to foreground character and interiority in her novels rather than overt political engagement. Peter’s behavior in this passage can also be read, however, not as a rejection of the imperial impulse, but as a performance of it, one that reveals homologies between patriarchy and imperialism as instantiations of white male power. **Peter’s fantasy begins as follows:**

But she’s extraordinarily attractive, he thought, as, walking across Trafalgar Square in the direction of the Haymarket, came a young woman who, as she passed Gordon’s statue, seemed, Peter Walsh thought (susceptible as he was), to shed veil after veil, until she became the very woman he had always had in mind; young, but stately; merry, but discreet; black, but enchanting. (52)

Peter’s interest is piqued first by the woman’s youth and attractiveness, traits which spur him into a voyeuristic and predatory fantasy. The reader gets little information about the girl’s actual appearance – the image provided is instead the product of Peter’s imagination as he projects his desires onto her. This parallels the process by which imperial discourses construct imaginary representations of “the Orient” that legitimize imperial enterprises and reinforce attitudes of Western superiority. The content of Peter’s vision of the girl is also significant: she is “black, but enchanting,” emanating the aura of mystery, exoticism, and seductiveness typically associated with non-Western cultures in Orientalist discourse.

Peter’s status as a colonial administrator recently returned from India is also relevant here, as is the setting of the passage in Trafalgar Square – a location that, **as Cohen rightly observes**, monumentalizes British military might and imperial dominance. **Woolf develops these elements of the passage as it proceeds, writing that “[Peter] pursued; she changed [...] he was an adventurer, reckless, he thought, swift, daring, indeed (landed as he was last night from India) a romantic buccaneer, careless of all these damned proprieties” (53).** The text characterizes the walk specifically as a pursuit, a term with threatening, martial connotations, and Peter thinks of it in relation to his past as an imperial “adventurer,” self-consciously linking his project in India to his pursuit of this young girl through London.