

Quotations and How to Handle Them

When inserting quotations for discussion or to support or refute arguments you wish to make, always remember that there is a protocol for handling them. **To properly use a quotation, it must be introduced with thoughtfulness, inserted, and then discussed at some length.**

1. First, introduce the subject of the quotation. Remember to discuss written or artistic works in the present tense. If you want to discuss a point made by author Susan Sontag, for example, you might introduce the subject of her statement in this way:

Author and critic Susan Sontag doesn't believe that viewing films at home is at all the same experience as seeing them in a theater. In fact, she seems to believe that such viewing cheapens the experience.

The preceding two statements adequately introduce the subject and let the reader know that the quotation from the author is likely to follow.

2. Second, put an introduction "tag" at the beginning or ending to the actual quoted passage. Here the "tags" give the author's name and a verb. For example:

Sontag states, "The conditions of paying attention in a domestic space are radically disrespectful of film" (402).

OR

"The conditions of paying attention in a domestic space are radically disrespectful of film," states the author (Sontag 402).

3. Finally, discuss the quotation and the subject in some depth and by offering insight. For example:

She clearly wants to have movies viewed only in the preferred setting of a theater so viewers would see them only in their most ideal environment. Perhaps her argument has validity, but today's realities of television-trained viewers, rising cinema costs, the rush to video-ize new films, and the hectic pace of people's lives precludes this ideal and would mean far fewer films being viewed by far fewer viewers. But, is that a good idea? Let's examine the additional implications of Sontag's ideal viewing environment.

You get the idea. I repeat, **to properly use a quotation, it must be introduced with thoughtfulness, inserted, and then discussed at some length.** Otherwise, there is no reason to afford it the weight and importance of residence in your carefully-crafted paper.

Thus, by correctly using discussion and quotation, you have created the following coherent and thoughtful paragraph that makes a point for the reader:

Author and critic Susan Sontag doesn't believe that viewing films at home is at all the same experience as seeing them in a theater. In fact, she seems to believe that such viewing cheapens the experience. Sontag states, "The conditions of paying attention in a domestic space are radically disrespectful of film" (402). She clearly wants to have movies viewed in the preferred setting of a theater so viewers would see them only in their most ideal environment. Perhaps her argument has validity, but today's realities of television-trained viewers, rising cinema costs, the rush to video-ize new films, and the hectic pace of people's lives precludes this ideal and would mean far fewer films being viewed by far fewer viewers. But, is that a good idea? Let's examine the additional implications of Sontag's ideal viewing environment.

Your work, of course, will be double-spaced and in the correct size and type font!

For quotations that will run in excess of four lines (MLA format), there is a different format protocol. The entire quotation is indented one inch from the left margin. The introductory “tag” is set off with a colon, and no quotation marks are used. The ending punctuation goes at the end of the final word, to the left of the reference parenthesis. The following paragraph demonstrates the proper technique.

Dave Ellis, writing in *Becoming a Master Student, 8th Edition*, stresses the importance of using writing as a learning tool. He makes a strong argument for not only note-taking, but revising, rewriting and rethinking the notes made in class or lectures. He observes:

You can extend this technique by writing it down not just once, but many times.

Let go of the old images of being in elementary school and being forced to write, “I will not throw paper wads” 100 times on the chalkboard after school. Used with items that you choose to remember, repetitive writing is a powerful technique.

Writing engages a different kind of memory than speaking. Writing prompts us to be more logical, coherent, and complete. Written reviews reveal gaps in knowledge that oral reviews miss, just as oral reviews reveal gaps that mental reviews miss. (88)

Clearly, Ellis is making a strong case for including writing as a powerful learning technique, along with speaking aloud important information and mentally reviewing it whenever possible. Ellis wants to promote engaging all of a student’s learning faculties – to build a versatile and complete learning “tool kit” to make learning, and remembering, easier and more productive.

The above complete paragraph includes the opening contextual material that introduces the concept to be discussed. The introductory “tag” is correctly formatted and inserted to delineate the quotation. The quotation itself, because it is longer than four typewritten lines, is indented one inch from the left margin (MLA format) and omits quotation marks. Note the ending period and parenthetical placement.

These two pages give the basics for using quotations from printed texts. For special situations not covered here, such as lines of poetry or dialogue, refer to a quality writer’s handbook such as *The Brief Handbook* by Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell.