Practising academic integrity: How to include direct quotations in your writing

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Using direct quotations from sources is an important way to include, or blend sources into your writing. To practise academic integrity it is important to follow academic writing conventions in your discipline about using and referencing direct quotations. This resource offers general guidance. Check with your teachers about rules in your discipline or area of study.

What is a direct quotation?
A direct quotation is a word-for-word extract from a source. Direct quotations are used to include the words (and ideas) from sources into your writing. All direct quotations must to be referenced and page numbers noted in in-text referencing. If the source does not have page numbers (for example electronic sources do not always have page numbers) you need to show this in the in-text referencing bracket. In APA 6th referencing style this is shown as (Dodge, 2013, n. p.).

Examples
Short and long quotations are formatted differently in most referencing styles. The referencing style sets the rules about what counts as a short quote (usually between 30–40 words) and what counts as a long quote (usually over 30–40 words). The referencing style also sets the conventions about how to format quotations used in your writing.
In APA 6th edition referencing style:

**Example one: a short direct quotation**

In APA 6th edition referencing style, short direct quotations (less than 40 words) are put into double inverted commas – “......” – and inserted into a sentence.

Driscoll (2010, p. 21) argues recycling is “the least cost-effective way to reduce environmental damage caused by mass production and mass consumption”.

**Example two: a long direct quotation**

In APA 6th edition referencing style, long quotations (40 words and longer) are not put in inverted commas. Instead, they are indented on both sides by 1.5cm.

Turner et al. (2010, p. 62) provide a good explanation of the way assignment writing at university involves drawing on, and using relevant literature, or existing knowledge:

> the most distinctive aspect of university education is the way it is linked to the literature. While assessment is structured to encourage a student to develop new ideas rather than repeat what is already known, it also demands that those ideas are developed from and related to the literature. Not surprisingly, rules and expectations have been established for how to use the literature in any piece of work. The rules are quite strict, although often there is a degree of variation between disciplines and even within disciplines.

**Remember:** Each referencing style has slightly different rules about how to use direct quotations. Understanding your referencing style guide is part of learning how to write in your discipline or course.

Think of the referencing style guide as a code book, outlining the rules and conventions about how to include and acknowledge sources used in assignments. It is important to download the referencing style guide (and print if possible) used in your unit or course. Always use the referencing style guide during editing phases to make sure you have correctly and consistently shown when you use others’ words.

**Are quotes an effective way to use sources in my assignments?**

Assignments are the place where students demonstrate their understanding. Using paraphrases demonstrates a much higher level of skill and understanding than including a direct quotation. Paraphrases require you to put the meaning of a source into your own words. Direct quotations are other people’s words. This means it is more difficult to demonstrate your understanding by using quotations.
There are easy ways to show a higher level of skill and understanding and practise academic integrity when using direct quotations. Make sure the quote is:

• relevant to the point you are making in the sentence/paragraph
• from a credible source
• introduced and unpacked (blended into the rest of your writing)
• correctly referenced.

When should I use direct quotations?

Direct quotations can be a very effective way to include the words or ideas of credible sources into your writing. However, as a general rule, students are expected to use direct quotations sparingly in assignments and exams.

In most disciplines it is appropriate to use direct quotations from disciplinary experts to define key ideas, principles or theoretical concepts, and when the exact wording of the source is essential to the assignment topic, or the point you are making. This means you will use only a couple of direct quotations in most assignments, and the rest of the time you will use paraphrases and summaries to include sources in your writing.

The two places to use direct quotations in assignments:

1. If the section of the text is famous, or the wording in the original offers insight, or is crucial to the point you are making.
2. When defining concepts and principles. A brief direct quotation from an expert in the field is the best way to provide a credible and precise definition.

Disciplinary conventions about using direct quotes

Use of direct quotations in assignments will vary, depending on the academic conventions of your area of study, and the type of assignment. In some assignments, particularly in scientific disciplines, it is not appropriate to use direct quotations at all. However, in some assignments and areas of study it is appropriate, and necessary, to use quite a few direct quotations.

• It is common in scientific writing found in Environmental Sciences for example, not to use direct quotations at all. Instead, students are expected to use paraphrases and summaries to include credible existing knowledge into their writing.
• When Creative Writing students write assignments analysing novels, they tend to use lots of direct quotes from the novel to provide evidence to illustrate their discussion. Similarly, Media Studies students often use quite a few direct quotations to provide evidence when analysing transcripts of TV programs, or deconstructing advertisements, films or websites.
• Assignments about theoretical debates can mean most of the writing is about different ways disciplinary experts define and apply concepts. In these types of assignments students may use many direct quotations in order to define lots of theoretical concepts.
Use of direct quotations varies depending on disciplinary writing conventions and the type of assignment. It is important to check the assignment description and marking criteria, and check with your teacher about use of direct quotes in your discipline, and in particular assignments.

**Tips for using direct quotations effectively in your writing**

When used carefully and sparingly, direct quotations from credible sources can be an effective way to use sources in your assignments. Finding a relevant quote from a credible source is the first step.

The following tips will help you to make the most of direct quotations in your writing:

- **Always reference** direct quotations in-text or in a footnote, and make sure the wording is correct (exactly matches the original source).
- Always check the referencing style guide rules about formatting short and long direct quotations.
- Remember, as a general rule, direct quotations should be used sparingly. In some types of scientific writing it is not appropriate to use direct quotations at all.
- Use quotes to define key ideas, principles, and theoretical concepts, or if the wording in the original source is crucial to the topic of the assignment, or the point you are making.

**Related Quick Guides**

Practising academic integrity: Blending direct quotes into your writing, Practising academic integrity: An introduction to referencing