



Notes on Quotes: Special Circumstances

Handout courtesy of Sue Kuykendall

When you quote from a source, you must use the source's *exact words*. Everything between the quotation marks must be *exactly as it was in the original*—same words, same spelling, same punctuation, same capitalization. However, there are some special circumstances in which you may change an author's words. Below are guidelines for managing these and other special circumstances related to quoting.

1. If only part of a source's sentence is useful to you, you may leave out some words. Then, you must use **ellipses** to show that you omitted words. The remaining quotation must still make sense, and the meaning must be the same as in the original material.

Zandt argues that "Our attention span . . . is not in the limited supply that marketers would have us believe . . ."

2. You may add a very basic word to make a quote fit into your introductory sentence, or to clarify the meaning of the quote (without changing the meaning). If you add something to a quote, you must use **brackets** around the added/changed words. For example, you can add "that" or a verb, or replace a vague pronoun with a specific noun. In the example below, the original sentence used "us" instead of "Americans," but the reference of the pronoun was lost when the sentence was pulled from the article.

As Romm says, "it's equally important not to leave people with the impression that . . . global warming is mainly going to impact other countries, and not [Americans]" (Romm).

3. If a quote has an error in it, you may either correct it in brackets, or add the word **sic** in brackets after the error so that your reader (your professor) knows that it wasn't you who made the error. "*Sic*" is a Latin word meaning "thus" or "so." You should put the word in italics since it is a non-English word (all foreign words are always put in italics). Unfortunately, many online articles, even in reputable sources, have typing errors in them, so this is a useful thing to know. In the following example, "McDonald's" is incorrect—the apostrophe is omitted.

"McDonalds [*sic*] just announced an additional \$20 million annually to open 30 outlets each year in India," reports Amit Srivastava at *AlterNet*.

4. When you quote something that has a quote inside it, use **single quotation marks** inside the double quotation marks (this is the *only* time that you ever use single quotation marks).

Furthermore, the author says, “The obesity epidemic has become so alarming in the US that it led to more than 130 retired generals, admirals and senior military leaders to frame the issue as a national security threat, writing that, ‘Obesity rates threaten the overall health of America and the future strength of our military’” (Srivastava).

5. When a quote would be **more than four typed lines** with normal (one-inch) margins, do not use quotation marks. Instead, set the quotation in ten spaces—one inch—from the left margin (use the margin control on the ruler bar; do not indent each line manually). If you need to cite an author or page number, put the final period *before* the parenthetical citation (it’s just a rule; don’t look for logic here). Use double-spacing throughout, and do not put any extra spaces before or after a set-in quote. When you continue the paragraph below the set-in quote, be sure to start typing *on the left margin*; don’t allow the auto-indent to create a new paragraph.

In his best-selling book *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the American Meal*, Eric Schlosser discusses the government’s failure to protect consumers from the hazards of fast food. Profit comes before public safety even in cases of egregious negligence:

Both the USDA and the meatpacking industry argue that details about where a company has distributed its meat must not be revealed in order to protect the firm’s “trade secrets.” In February of 1999, when IBP recalled 10,000 pounds of ground beef laced with small pieces of glass, the company would disclose only that the meat had been shipped to stores in Florida, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio. Neither IBP, nor the USDA, would provide the names of those stores. (213)

Clearly, IPB’s need to protect its business interests was considered more important than the government’s responsibility to protect consumers. As Schlosser points out, there had been efforts by the Clinton administration to give the USDA greater power to control the meatpacking industry through mandatory recalls and fines, but Congress refused to pass the proposed legislation (214).