Quotations

Leading Into a Quotation

Quoting a Word or Two

Just insert it so that it fits smoothly in your sentence.

He found the concert to be an "emotional" experience.

Quoting a Phrase or Sentence

As a general rule, precede quoted material of more than a word with a comma.

Johnson said, "It was an emotional experience."

When the text preceding the quoted material could stand alone as an independent clause, lead into the quoted material with a colon.

Johnson had tears in his eyes as he spoke of the concert: "It was an emotional experience."

Punctuation After a Quotation

Here's a source of confusion for a lot of people. Is it a period first and then the end quotation mark or is it the other way around?

- The period or comma goes inside the quotation marks.
- Question marks or exclamation marks go inside the quotation marks if the person you are quoting is the one asking or exclaiming. If the writer is the one asking or exclaiming, the question mark or exclamation mark goes outside of the quotation marks.

Note: When using MLA or APA format to document research, the punctuation is different; the period does sometimes appear outside the quotation marks.

General Guidelines

Here are some general guidelines to consider when working with quotations:

- Capitalize the first word in your quotation if your quotation could stand alone as a sentence.
- If your quotation is more than a few words, let it begin or end your sentence. Avoid sandwiching it in the middle.
- Do not use quotation marks for long quotations (three or more lines). Instead, start on a new line and indent the whole quotation (1/2 to 1 inch).
- Use an ellipsis (...) to indicate that words have been left out of your quotation.
- In dialog, start a new paragraph each time you switch from one speaker to another.
- For quotations within quotations, use single quotation marks.

- Do not use quotation marks around slang terms.
- When quoting poetry of two or more lines, indent the whole passage (1/2 to 1 inch) and copy the lines of poetry exactly as the poet arranged them.

Setting up Block Quotations

If you are using MLA format to document research and your quotation takes up more than four typed lines of text, it must be set up as a block quotation. Block quotations should be used sparingly--and only when all of the lines are necessary to fully illustrate an important point. As a general rule, papers of four to six pages should contain no more than two block quotations. (Too many block quotations can cause a writer to lose his or her voice in the paper.)

Use the following guidelines when setting up block quotations:

- To set off a block quotation, begin the quotation on a new line.
- Indent the quotation one inch from the left margin.
- Do not use quotation marks. (The new line and the indentation indicate the use of direct words.)
- Use double-spaced typing, just like you do in the rest of the paper.
- At the end of the quotation, place the period before the parentheses.
- After the parentheses, begin a new line. Then, return to the normal margin and type a comment to complete the paragraph. **Do not end a paragraph on a block quotation.** Instead, explain the significance of the quotation before moving on to the next point.

Example
As a child, Wolff lives in many different places. Vivid descriptions of each place give the reader a clear understanding of the kind of world that the author experienced as a child. For example, Wolff gives the reader a reader a tour of his room in a West Seattle boarding house when he writes:

> *Our room was in a converted attic. It had two camp beds and between them, under the window, a desk and chair. It smelled of mildew. The yellow wallpaper was new but badly hung and already curling at the edges. It was the kind of room that B-movie detectives wake up in, bound and gagged, after they've slipped a Mickey. (37-38)*

The description in this passage helps the reader to understand not only how the room looked, but also how the room smelled

Links to Additional Information

- "Quoting and Paraphrasing" from the Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin Madison

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