

## How to quote effectively

When you quote, you use the exact words of another author in your essay. In college, you will quote all the time. A quotation is a common form of evidence and often a jumping off point for your own analysis. Since quoting is so common, you want to make sure that you do it effectively.

What is wrong with the following?

*Education presents many challenges. "I tell students that there is no one 'right' way to get ahead." The pressures of education present many hardships for students.*

First, who is being quoted here? Second, how does the quotation relate to the other sentences? As a reader, I am confused by the quotation. Instead of clarifying the point, the quotation has disrupted the ideas of the first and third sentences.

### Guidelines for an effective quotation

*First*, make sure you understand the point you are trying to make. If you don't know what you're saying, there is no quotation in the world that will help you.

*Second*, make sure that the quotation you want to use actually relates to the point you are making. Reread the quotation and the section from the source to make sure you have interpreted the quotation correctly. Unrelated quotations don't only show sloppiness, they show that you have misunderstood the material in the class.

### The quotation sandwich

Once you have done the first two steps, then you are ready to integrate your quotation into your essay. There are three parts to remember. Students tend to focus on the middle part, which is the quotation itself, but the quotation is just the meat of your sandwich. It needs to be supported between two slices of bread. Here's the three parts of the "quotation sandwich":

- **Introduce quotation.**

A quotation is an interruption. Suddenly someone else's words are intruding into your essay. To reduce the interruption, lead into the quotation. Provide the relevant context and introduce the person you are quoting in a signal phrase.

- **Provide quotation.**

Make sure the language is exact. Make necessary grammatical changes and put those changes in brackets. Put the page number of the book you got the quotation from in parentheses after the closed quotation marks and before the period.

- **Explain the significance of quotation.**

Sometimes a quotation can speak for itself, but most often it's better to explain how you interpret the quotation. Usually, a quotation is supposed to be used as evidence in your essay. You always need to explain how your evidence proves the point you are trying to make. In some cases, your quotation may supply the point for which you will give evidence. In this case, make sure that you explain the point that the quotation is making.

Here's a rewrite of the example above:

*Students feel pressured to succeed and believe that the only way to do well in life is to get good grades in school. Yet this isn't the only way to succeed in life. Zinsser "[tells] students that there is no one 'right' way to get ahead" (472). He even invites successful people to tell students about their paths to success. These paths rarely have to do with taking the right classes and getting good grades. Zinsser's students have trouble believing the speakers. The pressure to succeed is so strong that they cannot conceive of another path to success. They want a sure thing.*