

# SSU Writing Center

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## Mechanics of Quoting

This handout offers advice on the mechanics of quoting dialogue or text from other writers' books and articles. Integrating quoted material gracefully and effectively into your own writing is difficult, and the mechanics of the matter (getting the punctuation right and so forth) are only one element of that difficulty. When you write papers that incorporate research material, you're always wise to consult a tutor or talk with your teacher about how successfully you're acknowledging and quoting your sources.

Note that this handout does not cover mechanics of citing sources using correct bibliographical style and conventions. Such conventions vary widely from field to field, and you can seek help from the Library and from the Writing Center if you need resources to understand those conventions.

All examples below will use the following quotation:

We must use time creatively, and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy, and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity.

--Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

### Basic Methods and Mechanics of Quoting

You can incorporate source material either directly (using the exact words) or indirectly (using your own words but still acknowledging that you borrowed the ideas from a source).

**Direct Quotation:** All of the examples below use direct quotations in correct style:

Martin Luther King, Jr. argued that "We must use time creatively."

"We must use time creatively," argued Martin Luther King, Jr.

Arguing that "We must use time creatively," Martin Luther King, Jr. sought to raise our sense of urgency in the battle against injustice.

Notice that there's no comma after the "that" in the above example. We do add a comma when people are speaking lines of dialogue and when the quoted material is not naturally blended into the surrounding prose:

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "We must use time creatively."

**Indirect Quotation:** If you use a source's ideas but change the words, use no quotation marks but still acknowledge your source:

Martin Luther King, Jr. urged us to be creative with our use of time.

**Integrated Direct Quotation:** This method combines the attributes of indirect and direct quoting:

Martin Luther King, Jr. urged us to "use time creatively."

As in this example, you can incorporate only a few words of a source text into your own prose. Use quotation marks around any clusters of words you copy down verbatim.

## Some Special Knowledge with which to Wow Your Teachers

1. Use an **ellipsis** to show that you've left out some material from the text you're quoting. Use **three ellipsis points** when you omit some words within a single sentence:

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Now is the time to . . . transform our pending national elegy into a creative song of brotherhood."

Use **four ellipsis points** when you leave out a whole sentence or anytime your quotation picks up again after a period:

Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "We must use time creatively, and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right . . . . Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity."

2. Use **brackets** when you change a word or words or when you add a comment within a quotation:

"We must use time creatively," wrote Martin Luther King, Jr., "and forever realize that [now is the time] to do right."

3. **For Long Quotations:** Quotations of more than four typed lines (MLA style) or 40 words (APA style) should be set off in their own paragraphs and indented ten spaces (twice the length of a paragraph indent). The original quote on page 1 illustrates this idea correctly.

## A Brief Quiz

Punctuate the following sentences correctly:

1. Jim said watch out for that tree!
2. While Descartes argued I think, therefore I am, the later romantics learned to place much greater faith in emotion rather than thought.
3. Franklin Roosevelt referred to the attack on Pearl Harbor as A day which will live in infamy.
4. Ripeness is all wrote Shakespeare.
5. In urging Americans Ask not what your country can do for you, Kennedy was placing the responsibility for a successful society on the shoulders of individuals.
6. In urging Americans to refrain from asking what America could do for them, Kennedy was placing the responsibility for a successful society on the shoulders of individuals.

Answer the following questions, all of which pertain to the quotation below:

Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think more clearly is a necessary first step towards political regeneration: so that the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers.

--George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"

7. Write a sentence using a direct quotation from George Orwell.
8. Write a sentence using an indirect quotation from Orwell.
9. Write a sentence using an integrated direct quotation from Orwell.
10. Write a sentence using a direct quotation, plus an ellipsis and brackets.