

Incorporating Quotations in Social Science Papers

Social science papers require the incorporation of course materials or independent research into analytical papers. Quotes, however, serve an instrumental purpose, and must be incorporated in a way that supports the main argument of the paper.

Writers should use quotations as *support* for an argument; they are not arguments in and of themselves. Thus, quotations need to be incorporated using a three step process (introduction, presentation, explanation).

1. Introduction – Provide the context your reader needs to make sense of the quote.

- Direct quotes are really helpful to define terms or clarify nuances in an author’s work.
- What is the source of the quote and why is it credible?
 - i. Example: In his provocative critique of Putnam’s work, Prof. Claude Fischer (a noted sociologist at UC-Berkeley) asserts that Putnam ignores interpersonal social capital, and that this oversight tempers the claims in *Bowling Alone*.
- Where in the argument does this quote come from?
 - i. Example 1: Early in *Bowling Alone*, Putnam evocatively describes the collapse of social networks. He writes that “...”
 - ii. Example 2: Locke defines political power as “...”

2. Presentation – Present the quote, using proper punctuation and grammar.

- Partial sentences need to be integrated into full sentences.
 - i. Example: Hobbes describes the state of nature as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (xiii).
- Don’t be afraid to paraphrase. Only use a direct quotation if you believe the original text is crucial to support your point.
- Paraphrased points still need citations. Your reader may find your point interesting and want to go back and read the text for himself/herself.
- Try to keep quotations short – one to two lines are usually all you need.

- Block quotations – If you do need to use a long quotation – one that takes up four or more lines of your paper – convert it into block quote format. Indent the quotation half an inch (or the indentation you use for the beginning of each paragraph) and single space the quotation. Also, remove the quotation marks (but not the citation).

Example of block quote format:

John Locke defines political power as

a *right* of making laws with penalties of death, and consequently all less penalties, for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of the community, in the execution of such laws, and in the defence of the common-wealth from foreign injury; and all this only for the public good. (Locke, 12)

By this, Locke gestures toward the importance of the common good: that is, Locke wants us to realize that political power is meant to foster...

3. Explanation – Once you've introduced the source/context and then presented the quote, make sure you clearly explain how/why the quotation supports your larger argument.
 - While you may think this is obvious, it is very easy for the reader to misinterpret quotations. Make sure the reader understands how YOU think the quotation links back to your thesis.
 - i. Example: Hobbes describes the state of nature as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (xiii). While Hobbes declaration that life in the state of nature is so grim as to make our prospects seem hopeless, there is a way to avoid constant war: we erect a commonwealth that can preserve our lives.
 - Always cite your sources. The easiest way to avoid plagiarism is to cite your sources as you write, rather than waiting to put citations in at the end. Direct quotations have the red flag of quotation marks that call out for citation, but paraphrased points do not.
 - Finally, don't overuse quotations. Quotes should never substitute for your voice. In general, quotes should never make up more than 10% to 15% of your paper, which means that in a ten page paper, there should be no more than 20 to 30 lines of quotations (and probably less than that). Your professors and TAs are interested in how you can use course materials and research to support YOUR argument.