



Contextualizing Quotes

This handout focuses on how to properly integrate and analyze quotations as supporting evidence in an academic paper.

Choosing Quotes

The quotes you use must be properly integrated into the paper in order to serve as solid supporting evidence. Below are some questions to consider when choosing your quotes. If you're unable to answer these questions, you won't be able to appropriately contextualize and integrate the quote into your paper.

Currency	Was the source of the quote recently written? Is the information up to date?
Relevance	How does this source relate to your topic overall? How does this specific quote relate to the subtopic you are discussing in your paragraph?
Accuracy	Is the quote factually correct in the context of your paper?
Purpose	What is the specific reason that you are using this quote? Why include this as a direct quote instead of paraphrasing the information? If you can't answer this question, it's probably better to paraphrase.

Speaking and Writing Center [1]: The currency necessary for the quote to be relevant may differ depending on the discipline. For example, scientific information may change more frequently and thus need to be sourced from more recent sources, while facts about long-established historical events may have more leeway. Your professor may also have further expectations about the time frame of the sources you use.

Speaking and Writing Center [2]: Remember that even if you are paraphrasing someone else's ideas instead of quoting it directly, if the idea or information is not your own, you still need to cite it properly.

Speaking and Writing Center [3]: Without providing context, your reader may not have a clear idea of the source you are taking a quote from and where the quote fits in its original source. Context helps the reader understand the relevance of the quote by both providing details of where and who it came from as well as how it connects to the larger topic of the paragraph or paper. Your argument is only better supported by an outside quote if your readers understand how the quote is relevant and significant.

Introducing Quotes

When adding a quote to your essay, it is important to introduce it with context.

Context can be:

- Who wrote or said this?
- Where did they say this? Was it in an interview, a study?
- When did it occur?

Examples of insufficient context:

Studies have shown...

Beyoncé once said...

Speaking and Writing Center [4]: What studies? Make sure the reader knows why this information is relevant. You also need to clarify whether these studies were primary sources that you yourself read or studies that the sources you read referenced in their work. If the latter, contextualizing will also include saying something along the lines of mentioning the source you're reading and how they referenced that study. If possible, you should try to find the original study that your source used, but if you can't, make sure it is clear that you are reading someone else's account of the study, not the original study itself.

Speaking and Writing Center [5]: Why is Beyoncé relevant to your topic? Saying "once said" also makes it unclear what exactly you mean. Was once recently or was it more than a decade ago? And, where was this quote given: at a concert? in an interview? Adding context will make it clear the circumstances in which she was quoted so that your reader knows how it fits into the larger picture of your topic.



Examples after adding context:

A 2024 study for the Public Transport journal explored the effect COVID-19 had on public transport and how transportation companies could maximize ridership, finding that...

During a 2014 interview with Time Magazine about her experiences with plagiarism in the music industry, singer-songwriter Beyoncé said...

A 2020 study on non-pharmaceutical interventions in COVID-19 prevention by N. Ferguson (2020, quoted in Nature, 2020) said...

Nature cited a 2020 study by N. Ferguson who investigated non-pharmaceutical interventions in COVID-19 prevention to further demonstrate...

Including context can also make your quote more credible and effective. Consider these examples in an essay about changing scientific consensus on the interpretation of neural data. The first example below lacks context, making it a less effective quote, while the second example provides context and is thus more effective:

Dr. Smith's study found...

A more recent study by Dr. Smith marked a departure from earlier analysis techniques. With her more rigorous comparison of changes within each individual's data, she found that...

In the second example, the reader gets a sense of the timeline, why the study is relevant to the topic, and how the doctor's techniques differed from others. The reader is better prepared to understand the quote and apply it to the text's argument.

Speaking and Writing Center [6]: These introductions prepare the reader for the quote with the knowledge of how it relates to the topic and an idea of why it matters.

Speaking and Writing Center [7]: This is an example of citing something that was paraphrased in a different article.

Speaking and Writing Center [8]: The citation style for citing something from a secondary source might vary depending on which style you are using. What is important here is the larger attention to the "quoted in" which indicates you did not look at original study, but rather quoted someone else who did.

Speaking and Writing Center [9]: This is a narrative version of the previous example, which also says how the source you are referencing is being pulled from a different source that is quoting it, just without the parenthetical citation.

Speaking and Writing Center [10]: Another example of insufficient context; compared to the next sentence, this one provides no relevance of the topic or what exactly the study did.



Analyzing and Applying Quotes

After you've added a quote and given its context, make sure to not only explain its meaning but also how it supports your specific argument.

- Ask yourself, "Why does this quote matter?"
- Think about the main argument of your paper.
 - How does the quote support your claim?
 - What should the quote tell the reader about your topic and argument?
- Think about the reader.
 - Would someone with no knowledge on the topic understand your explanation of how the quote supports your argument?
 - What is stated vs. what is implied?

Speaking and Writing Center [11]: Quotes that have little or no relevance to the subject of the paper confuse the reader and take attention away from your main argument. Choose quotes that serve a specific purpose to your paper and argument.

Every quote you add in an academic paper should be contextualized and explained.

Example:

According to a 2009 report on the Dukes v. Wal-Mart trial in the *Humanity & Society Journal*, women of color must "navigate a workplace where others use them as scapegoats for their own frustrations, block them from training opportunities, or sabotage them by not doing work these women of color assign them" (Weissinger, 2009, p. 352). This discrimination, and the poor treatment they later received when they tried to bring it up to their superiors, shows that women of color had to fight more of an uphill battle for equitable treatment when compared to their white and/or male coworkers.

Speaking and Writing Center [12]: While you may interpret a quote or paraphrase one way, you can't assume that your reader interprets it or understands its relevance the same way depending on their knowledge of the content. Make sure the main points of your argument are stated explicitly.

Speaking and Writing Center [13]: This adds context about where the quote is from.

Speaking and Writing Center [14]: This phrase introduces the quote.

Speaking and Writing Center [15]: The in-text citation goes after the quote but before the period. The exact formatting of the reference will vary depending on which style you use.

Speaking and Writing Center [16]: This sentence then explains the implications of the quote and why it supports the author's thesis.