

## USING QUOTATION IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Much of the writing you will do for your courses at the Divinity School will necessitate the use of quotations—either from primary sources such as the Bible or significant thinkers such as Augustine, Luther, Wesley, etc., or from secondary sources—but using quotations effectively (as well as correctly documenting them) can be difficult.

Here are some guidelines\* that address:

- I. Why and When to Use a Quotation
- II. How Much Quotation to Use
- III. Choosing the Best Quotations
- IV. Smooth Integration of Quotations
- V. Plagiarism & Documenting and Formatting Quotations

### I. Why and When to Use a Quotation

Think of using quotations in what you write as akin to having a conversation with an interesting interlocutor who

- A. expresses him/herself particularly memorably or beautifully
- B. is an authority on your topic (support)
- C. provides a different viewpoint with which you may argue
- D. says something that needs to be analyzed in detail

#### *A. Memorable Phrasing*

Let's say you are writing a paper on the eucharist for Church History. Of course you can use expressions such as "eucharist," "communion," "Lord's supper," and so on. However, these may get a little dull after a while and you might want something to enliven your prose.

Perhaps a quotation might be useful: try Ignatius' "the medicine of immortality."

#### *B. Authority*

Quoting from authorities in a particular field of study is routine in scholarly papers, and such quotations—when used with intelligence—add credibility and support to what you have to say.

For example, let's imagine you are writing on the reign of the sixteenth-century Catholic monarch of England, Mary Tudor, and the religious tensions of the time:

When Mary took the throne of England she sought to undo many of the changes that her Protestant father, Henry VIII, had made. Laws were repealed and the English church once again knelt to Rome. However, with the revival of the Heresy Acts, Protestants began to be hunted down, tortured, and executed. It is no surprise, then, that “Marian catholicism . . . [has been judged] strong on repression, weak on persuasion . . . alienat[ing] moderate opinion and help[ing] to inoculate the English nation forever against roman Catholicism” (Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith*, 1).

As Duffy is an expert on the period, his words both add credibility to and amplify your own points.

### *C. A Differing Viewpoint*

You don’t always need to select quotations with which you agree. The use of a dissenting voice gives you something to argue against and can help you generate ideas and content for your paper.

### *D. Quotation for Analysis*

One type of writing you will be required to do at Duke Divinity School is *exegesis*. Exegesis is “the careful historical, literary, and theological analysis of a text” or close reading that demands “the deliberate, word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase consideration of all parts of a text in order to understand it as a whole” (Michael Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, 8-9). Exegesis necessarily, then, involves quotation, as this is the material for your analysis.

Here is an example taken from Richard Bauckham’s “Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story.” He writes that the Gospel of John

. . . begins with a deliberate echo of the opening words of Genesis and ends with a reference to the parousia (John 21:23, “until I come,” Jesus’ last words and the last words of the Gospel before the colophon), a reference that corresponds to the prayer with which Revelation concludes (Rev 22:20, “Come, Lord Jesus!”).

Biblical exegesis, however, is only one type of textual analysis. You will find yourself analyzing—and so quoting—for many other courses.

## **II. How Much Quotation?**

Perhaps the most common problem for many writers is deciding how much quotation to use. Both too little and too much can create problems, but usually the latter leads to greater difficulties (unless you are writing an exegesis).

#### *A. Too much*

The main problem with using too much quotation is that your paper ceases to be *your* paper but rather a collection of other writers' words and ideas. You need to strike a balance. If more than half of your paper is quotation, this is probably a problem, and even more than a third can cause trouble. Remember, your professor generally wants to hear what *you* know and/or think.

Novice writers—as well as writers encountering material with which they are unfamiliar or have difficulty comprehending—may also use too much quotation because they fail to discriminate what is or is not important in a text. Balance, then, requires both understanding and judgment.

#### *B. Too Little*

Some papers need no quotations. A personal reflection or meditation, for example, does not necessitate that you cite others. Also, a teacher might instruct you not to quote. However, if a paper is written in response to a set of readings, it is usual to quote from them so that you can directly engage them in your discussion and show that you understand what the author is saying.

### **III. Selecting What to Quote**

The quotations you use will be determined by a number of factors:

- assignment guidelines
- genre
- purpose
- good judgment

#### *A. Assignment guidelines*

Always take care to follow your professor's instructions as to whether you should use

- primary sources
- secondary sources
- or only your own ideas

#### *B. Genre*

Genre—the type of writing you are doing—will also influence your decision regarding use of quotation:

- a personal reflection may make no or little use of quotation
- an exegesis will necessarily make full use of both long and short quotations from the primary text
- an historical essay customarily will use material from both primary and secondary sources
- a theological argumentative or analytical paper will likewise make solid use of quotation from primary and/or secondary sources

### *C. Purpose*

Purpose is connected to both particular assignments and particular genres. If you are required to

- elucidate a text, clearly you must quote from it
- respond to a set of claims by a particular person, it is good to quote what that person is saying and take it apart

### *D. Good Judgment*

It's all very well to note the importance of good judgment; it is another thing both to teach it and acquire it. In *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Robert Persig writes about "mechanic's feel"—the good judgment necessary to work well with machinery—and states that it "is very obvious to those who know what it is, but hard to describe to someone who doesn't." In other words,

- good judgment comes from observation and instruction, but more importantly,
- good judgment is acquired in action

Pay attention to the advice and feedback given to you by your professors and preceptors. Register how quotation is used in what you read. Apply what you learn.

## **IV. Smooth Integration of Quotations**

Quotations should not stand out in your writing like a sore thumb. If one sentence is yours and the next sentence is a self contained quotation, and so on, this becomes clumsy. Quotations should be seamlessly integrated into your prose. This means they should fit

- grammatically (and be correctly punctuated)
- with the sense of what you are saying

### *A. Grammatical Fit*

- This quotation does not fit the surrounding grammar of the sentence:

During the Middle Ages the relationship between church and state began to shift, with the “*spheres of ecclesial and secular jurisdiction were firmly demarcated,*” although this was not to be accomplished without “*popes and kings alternately humiliate each other*” (Ozment, *Age of Reform 1250-1550*, 4).

- This does:

During the Middle Ages the relationship between church and state began to shift, with the “spheres of ecclesial and secular jurisdiction [becoming] firmly demarcated,” although this was not to be accomplished without “popes and kings alternately humiliat[ing] each other” (Ozment, 4).

Or . . . I could keep the original wording and rewrite around it

During the Middle Ages the “spheres of ecclesial and secular jurisdiction were firmly demarcated,” although this had not been the case in earlier centuries. However, church-state relations were not without their tensions, and we see “popes and kings alternately humiliate each other” again and again (Ozment, 4).

### B. *Making Sense*

Apart from fitting the surrounding grammar of a sentence, your quotations should make sense with what you are saying. Let’s say I am writing about the ecclesial novels of the nineteenth-century British writer Anthony Trollope and want to point out that his depictions of Anglican clergy, because they were realistic, included both good and bad attributes:

Although some critics might argue that his clergymen were too often reduced to caricatures, Trollope was nevertheless generally evenhanded in his presentation of the strengths and weaknesses of the bishops, deans, arch-deacons, and parsons he depicted. The Reverend Harding is shown as a caring and kind man, but blind to certain monetary abuses, while Mr. Crawley is a clergyman who “had Greek at his fingers’ ends” (*Last Chronicle of Barset*, chap. 4).

Here my quotation clearly doesn’t make much sense. Why would I mention Crawley’s mastery of Greek when talking more about moral attributes? Instead I need a quote that, say, talks about Rev. Crawley’s good and bad attributes. So

. . . The Reverend Harding is shown as a caring and kind man, but blind to certain monetary abuses, while Mr. Crawley is scrupulously honest but beset by “a crushing pride . . . which had put him into antagonism with all the world” (*Last Chronicle of Barset*, chap. 21).

## V. Plagiarism & Documenting and Formatting Quotations

Whenever you use a quotation you must document its source. If you do not, you may be accused of plagiarism. If you are unsure what exactly constitutes plagiarism, a detailed explanation can be found in link “Avoiding Plagiarism.”

How should you format your quotations and sources? Should you use parenthetical citations, footnotes, endnotes? While different style guides exist that map out the way in which references are formatted (see “Citing Sources” for detailed information), there is considerable uniformity in formatting the quotations themselves. Here are some basic examples:

- *Plain Quotation*  
According to New Testament scholar Michael Gorman, “A text without a context—a text isolated from its various contexts (plural)—is a potentially dangerous weapon.”<sup>1</sup>
- *Quotation with Omitted Text*  
According to New Testament scholar Michael Gorman, “A text without a context . . . is a potentially dangerous weapon.”<sup>1</sup> . . . (ellipses) signal omitted words
- *Quotation with Added/Interpolated Text*  
According to New Testament scholar Michael Gorman, “A text without a [historical, social, literary, and biblical] context . . . is a potentially dangerous weapon.”<sup>1</sup> The square brackets [ ] signal words not in the original quotation.
- *Intext vs. Offset Format*  
Short quotations can easily be integrated with your own sentences. Longer quotations (or five lines or more) are generally set apart from your writing, indented, and quotation marks are omitted.

### Further Resources

- *The Chicago Manual of Style* (see under Writing Resources)
- OWL Purdue Online Writing Lab – “Quoting Others”  
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/930/10/>
- OWL Purdue Online Writing Lab – “How to Use Quotation Marks”  
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/577/01/>
- University College, University of Toronto: “Using Quotations”  
<http://www.uc.utoronto.ca/quotations>

\* See Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein's *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006) for additional advice on working with the words of others and which informed my thinking on the topic (Judith Heyhoe, Director of The Writing Center).