

**How to use quotations
and paraphrases
(and why)
in research papers, take-home exams, presentation handouts etc.**

Please note:

- This text was specially written for students who have never done written academic work before. For students in higher semesters, these guidelines might be a little too basic. Nonetheless, even they might find it useful to cursorily read through this document.
- Further guidelines and advice can be found in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Please use one of the more recent editions, e.g. the 6th, ed. Joseph Gibaldi, New York: Modern Language Association of America 2003. The main criterion for checking if an older edition is recent enough: it must contain conventions for citing Internet sources.
- In this document, conventions and options for using direct quotations and paraphrases are illustrated through examples (the same example might be used several times; and some of the examples are invented).
- **Please pay special attention to the regulations on plagiarism** (sections I.2.2, IV.2) and make sure you follow the rules in order to avoid plagiarism!

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I General points

1) Purpose of quotes:

- a) Primary sources:
 - to present the object of your inquiry, or to prove your arguments/results. You interpret the text and work with it in detail. You may *never* quote a primary source and then just leave it to stand on its own without adding a *comment* / *explanation* on it (otherwise, why would you want to quote it in the first place?).
- b) Secondary sources:
 - to support your own argument...
 - ... either in a positive sense (= you take over that other person's opinion wholly or partly)
 - ... or in a *negative* sense (= you *disagree* {and say *why!* E.g. because that other critic's argument in your quote is contradictory in itself, or because it overlooks an important aspect in the text / in the society the work describes, etc.})
 - to illustrate the general situation/trends in literary criticism on your particular subject (this is especially important in longer *Hausarbeiten* or in your *Staatsexamensarbeit* / B.A./M.A./PhD dissertation)

2) General rules for choosing and quoting sources:

- 2.1) If you **quote** a source **for analysis and interpretation** (usually a **primary source**), you need to quote it in some length. However, if your quote becomes *too* long (c. more than 1/3 of the page), there's something wrong. In such cases, break up your quotes into smaller parts, and comment on each part separately. In some cases, it also makes sense to put a very long quote (or an entire text, e.g. a poem not used in class and unlikely to be known/available to your readers) into the *appendix* of your paper.

Quotes from secondary sources should usually not be longer than one paragraph. Use these quotes sparingly – sometimes a single word or a particularly well-expressed phrase is enough. If you want to take over / describe an

argument which takes up more than a paragraph, don't quote directly but indirectly, i.e. via paraphrase (giving the argument in your *own* words).

Quotations tend to suggest that you *agree* with the argument you quote, unless you *explicitly* make it *clear* that you disagree (and why).

2.2) **Always state where you got your information from! This applies to both direct and indirect quotes** (i.e. also to paraphrases!!!). (See remarks on bibliographical info and footnotes below.)

Reasons for this rule:

- a) You must 'pay your debt' to the colleague who wrote the article/book that helped you so much. **If you don't acknowledge your sources, you steal someone else's intellectual property and can get sued for plagiarism!!** And you will definitely fail your course without getting the chance to revise and re-submit your paper.
- b) You give your readers the opportunity to check out your full sources for themselves.

Exception: Don't give source references for **banalities or basic general knowledge!** For example, you don't need to quote anyone in order to 'prove' that Rudyard Kipling was the author of *Kim*, or that Henry VIII was the father of Elizabeth I – such things fall into the category 'general and undisputed knowledge'.

2.3) **Literary texts** are often available in several different editions. This is especially the case with literary 'classics', e.g. Shakespeare, Jane Austen, R.L. Stevenson etc. Please make sure you always **use critical or standard editions** by reputable editors & publishers (if you're uncertain, ask your teacher for recommendations). These might cost a few euros more, but they are worth it!!

Reasons:

- a) Some publishers / editors are more careful than others. Certain cheap editions of literary classics might contain faulty or outdated versions of texts (e.g. based on facsimile reprints of 19th-century editions, although recent scholarship might have uncovered that the 19th-century publisher made mistakes or alterations, or the author wanted to make certain changes to the text which were not included in all editions...); or faulty/limited background information. Thus, in extreme cases, you might get your whole analytical argument wrong because it was based on a mistake in the text edition you used!
- b) Many 'reputable' editions of literary texts contain much more (and more reliable – see point a!) background information than cheap editions do.
For instance, there might be:
 - a critical introduction (e.g. on...
 - ...the author's biography,
 - ...the work's social or literary contexts
 - ...the history of the text's reception by the reading public and by literary criticism, perhaps in different countries and historical periods)
 - glossaries (e.g. of regional or specialist words used in the text)
 - detailed annotations (e.g. explaining...
 - ...literary/mythological/historical allusions you might otherwise overlook, or which you might not understand
 - ...names, customs, historical events mentioned in the text
 - ... textual variations (e.g. if the author left behind two or more different manuscripts of the text – so that you can integrate these variations into your analytical argument, if they seem relevant to your topic)

This critical apparatus thus gives you lots of information ready-packed in one volume. Otherwise (if you used an edition without such an apparatus) you'd have to gather all this information yourself with the help of several separate secondary sources, which is often much more trouble, and partly impossible altogether (e.g. because undergraduate students don't always get access to an author's personal manuscripts etc.).

- c) For several reasons [incl. the ones given under a) and b)], critical/standard editions are often more current in libraries. Thus, if one of your readers wants to have a look at the context your quotes came from, and goes to a library to look at the book, he/she is more likely to find a critical/standard edition, and it will be easier for him/her to find the passage you quoted if the page numbers are the same...

Electronic media: Please see the guidelines in "How to Write a *Hausarbeit*" (www.anglistik.uni-muenster.de/en/ptts/Study/researchpapers.html), p. 4.

You may also quote **unpublished or non-written sources**, e.g. **radio & TV programmes, films, or personal conversations with writers** (if you're lucky...). For these as well, bibliographical information must be given. For rules on how to do this, and for more general information on formal rules for quoting and writing, see a recent(!) edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

II. Exactness of quotes

Quotes must be **absolutely exact!** If you change anything, show it by using [] **brackets**. For instance, when you leave something out, use “[...]”. You may also use these brackets to interpolate your own explanations or little grammatical changes.

E.g.: Sentence in your original source:

The public has a very limited and distorted opinion of Winston. I want to change this by writing a book about my memories of him as a private person.

Modified quote of this sentence in your own text:

Former British civil servant Joe Cooper recently claimed that “[t]he public has a very [...] distorted opinion of Winston [Churchill]” and announced that he “want[s] to change this by writing a book about [...] him as a private person.”

If your quote contains a **spelling mistake**, copy the mistake but add “[sic]” afterwards. This shows that the error is not your own but your source’s.

E.g.: Sentence in your original source:

Scheckspeare has a unique ability to dramatise such conflicts for the stage.

Quote of this sentence in your own text:

Franziskus Müller expressed a similar opinion in 1855, asserting that “Scheckspeare [sic] has a unique ability to dramatise such conflicts for the stage”.

A ‘quote within a quote’ is marked by *single* quotation marks: “”.

E.g.: Sentence in your original source:

“Third World” nationalism has often been criticised for its imitation of political principles which are essentially a “western” invention.

Quote of this sentence in your own text:

Mary MacDonald has pointed out that “‘Third World’ nationalism has often been criticised for its imitation of political principles which are essentially a ‘western’ invention.”

III. Integrating quotes into your own text

1) Long quotes (more than c. 3 lines) are set off from the main text, i.e. they form a separate paragraph with a bigger left-hand margin. This is enough to mark them as quotes – you don’t need to put them into inverted commas as well. Make sure these quotes don’t start too abruptly: your own text should *introduce* the quote before it starts, and you should add your own comments on this quote either before or after the quote.

E.g.: (*In both examples, the first paragraph is a sample of what your own text might be; the second paragraph is the quote.*)

a) Quoting from a literary text:

There is always a discrepancy between Marias’s aspirations and her more limited abilities. Maria repeatedly talks about these limitations in her conversations with other characters – for instance when she takes leave of Magdalene:

I am unable to do what I want to do, unable to fulfil my duties and ambitions. My failing powers render me quite inefficient for life. I feel like a bird in a cage, unable to fly, unable to go where I want to go. Therefore I need someone else to carry out the task I have been called upon to perform, and I am passing on my responsibilities to you.⁵

b) Quoting from an academic text:

Mary MacDonald, however, does not share Frantz Fanon’s belief that nationalism can be successfully used in the struggle against western imperialism:

“Third World” nationalism has frequently (and rightly) been criticised for its imitation of political principles which are essentially a “western” invention. If European and North American political principles are transferred wholesale to African contexts without being questioned or adapted to local circumstances, this is hardly more than a continuation of the traditional intellectual power structures which have been imposed through several centuries of colonial rule.⁹

2) Short quotes (less than c. 3 lines) do not get a separate paragraph, but must be integrated into a paragraph of your own text. Here, the quote is marked by double inverted commas (“ ”).

E.g.: a) *Quoting from a literary text:*

There is always a discrepancy between Maria's aspirations and her more limited abilities. Maria repeatedly talks about these limitations in her conversations with other characters. In the final scene, for instance, she tells Magdalene: “I am unable to do what I want to do [...]. My failing powers render me inefficient for life.”⁵

b) *Quoting from an academic text (make sure to mention the name of the critic in your introductory remarks!):*

Most critics who have theorised about short stories identify their limited length as the defining feature of this genre.⁶ However, others rather focus on certain structural characteristics. Thus, John Miller writes: “It must be possible to read a short story in one sitting.”⁷ Paul Cooper, by contrast, stresses the unity of time and place (or, as he terms it, the “narrative situation”).⁸

If you integrate a short quote into your own sentence, and the two are in the same language, **you may slightly adapt the quote to fit into your own sentence structure** (but, of course, without changing the meaning!). You must *show* that you have made changes by putting the changes in brackets.

E.g.: Maria is a good example of someone who wants to do a lot but is able to achieve only very little. In the farewell scene she admits her own awareness of her “failing powers” and the fact that the “task [she has] been called upon to perform” will have to be carried out by someone else.⁵

When a short quote and your own text are in **different languages**, do not merge languages within the same syntactic unit.

Instead...

a) ...give a *translation* of your quote in the main language of your paper.
In this case, give source information for the translation as well, e.g. either add bibliographical information about a published translation, or state that you did the translation yourself (“my translation”).
It might be good to add the quote in the *original* language in a footnote.

or

b) ...put the ‘foreign’ quote into a separate syntactic unit.

E.g.: Your original source runs:

le Marlow de *Cœur des Ténèbres* qui, au fur et à mesure qu’il pénètre dans la forêt, se fait de plus en plus accusateur.

How to quote this in your own text:

a) *Main text:*

Jacques Darras has pointed out that Marlow, the protagonist in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, “becomes more and more of an accuser as he gradually penetrates the forest.”¹⁰

With the following footnote:

¹⁰ “Marlow [...], au fur et à mesure qu’il pénètre dans la forêt, se fait de plus en plus accusateur.” Darras, “Le voyage en Afrique,” *Esprit* 128 (1987): 1–12, here 3.

b) *Main text:*

Jacques Darras comes to the same conclusion: “Marlow [...], au fur et à mesure qu’il pénètre dans la forêt, se fait de plus en plus accusateur.”¹⁰

With the following footnote:

¹⁰ Jacques Darras, “Le voyage en Afrique,” *Esprit* 128 (1987): 1–12, here 3.

BUT NOT:

Jacques Darras has pointed out that Marlow, the protagonist in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, “au fur et à mesure qu’il pénètre dans la forêt, se fait de plus en plus accusateur.”¹⁰

Mixing languages within the same syntactic unit is only acceptable when you are commenting on an expression in another language where the *precise phrase* is important and would not come across in a translation.

E.g.: When the narrator asserts that he is “striving ceaselessly against the hardships which beset us from all sides” (20), the hyperbole has an ironic effect. This sense of irony becomes even more obvious in the original Gaelic version of the story: in

the phrase “a’ strì gun abhsadh an aghaidh nan àmhghairean a tha a’ bualadh oirn o gach taobh,”¹¹ the sense of hyperbole is heightened further through alliteration.

If a quote appears in double inverted commas, **quotes within the quote** are given in single inverted commas.

E.g.: *Your original source runs:*

“Third World” nationalism has frequently (and rightly) been criticised for its imitation of political principles which are essentially a “western” invention.

How to quote this in your own text:

Mary MacDonald has pointed out that “‘Third World’ nationalism has often been criticised for its imitation of political principles which are essentially a ‘western’ invention.”⁹

IV. Paraphrasing a source

1) In a paraphrase, you give the jist of someone else’s text in your own words. Thus, there are no inverted commas. Nonetheless, you are *still* using someone else’s text and must document this with a bibliographical reference (in brackets or in a footnote/endnote).

E.g.: There is always a discrepancy between Marias’s aspirations and her more limited abilities. Maria repeatedly talks about these limitations in her conversations with other characters. In the farewell scene, for instance, she asks Magdalene to become her successor and finish what she has begun.⁵

2) A **paraphrase must differ significantly from the original text (in wording, not in meaning, of course)! It is *not* enough to merely change one or two words, or to slightly change the word order!**

If your wording stays too close to your source text, this counts as plagiarism *even if* you give bibliographical information (a footnote after a paraphrase suggests that you used the *contents* of someone else’s text, but the absence of inverted commas suggests that you have *expressed* those contents in your *own words*).

E.g.: *Your source text runs:*

“Third World” nationalism has frequently (and rightly) been criticised for its imitation of political principles which are essentially a “western” invention. If European and North American political principles are transferred wholesale to African contexts without being questioned or adapted to local circumstances, this is hardly more than a continuation of the traditional intellectual power structures which have been imposed through several centuries of colonial rule.⁹

How to paraphrase this in your own text:

!!! Please not like this:

~~Third World nationalism has often been criticised for imitating principles which are essentially a western invention. Intellectual power structures which have been imposed through several centuries of colonial rule can continue to exist if European and North American political principles are transferred wholesale to African contexts.⁹~~

But like this:

Several critics have warned against the adoption of nationalism as a political ideology by ‘Third World’ leaders and intellectuals. The reason for such warnings is a perceived danger that the specific traditions and conditions of non-western societies might be ignored, and that an unquestioning adoption of European and American ideas could perpetuate the colonial domination of African thought by white outsiders.⁹

Also see the remarks on plagiarism in section I.2.2.

V. Bibliographical information

In the **international** academic community, various **different styles** are in used and accepted:

- only brief references in **brackets** in the main text [e.g. “(Miller 2001: 20–23)"]; full bibliographical info can only be found in bibliography at the end of the research paper

E.g.: Sentence in your main text:

Several postcolonial theorists have argued that Ireland should also be included in the field of Postcolonial Studies (e.g. Said, 265–288; Boehmer, 4).

Bibliography:

Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. OPUS series. Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press 1995.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus 1993. Repr. New York: Vintage 1994.

- **footnotes:** with full bibliographical info where a source is first mentioned, and abbreviated bibliographical info at subsequent mentionings; *plus* a full bibliography at the end

E.g.: Sentence in your main text:

Several postcolonial theorists have argued that Ireland should also be included in the field of Postcolonial Studies.¹

Footnote (if this is the first time when these sources are mentioned):

¹ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, OPUS series, Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press 1995, 4; Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Chatto & Windus 1993, repr. New York: Vintage 1994, 265–288.

Footnote (if the sources have already been mentioned in a previous footnote):

¹ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, 4; Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 265–288.

Bibliography:

Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. OPUS series. Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press 1995.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus 1993. Repr. New York: Vintage 1994.

- **endnotes:** like footnotes; but while footnotes can be found at the bottom of the page where the quote occurs, endnotes all appear together at the end of the research paper

The **MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers** now recommends brackets as the most common form.

But: Some university teachers, publishers etc. still prefer footnotes or endnotes.

Thus: When writing an academic paper, please ask your teacher in advance which form of bibliographical referencing s/he prefers.