Quoting Sources: MLA Examples

Whenever you work with sources in any type of writing, you are responsible for giving full credit to the authors of those sources, including any words, ideas, or specific information borrowed or used. Any failure to acknowledge completely and correctly your use of sources is considered plagiarism and is a serious breach of academic honesty.

Ways to Work with Information Taken from Others

- **DIRECT QUOTATION**: placing another person’s words in quotation marks
  - **DIALOGUE-STYLE TAG**: a “who” and a strong (action) verb—followed by a comma, with the quoted passage capitalized.
    
    **Example**: As one historian notes, “The monarch . . . was expected to employ whatever violence was necessary in pursuit of social stability and safety for his subjects” (McGlynn 54).
  - **BLENDED SENTENCE**: borrowing just a “word” (placing the borrowed word in quotes) or “short phrase” (placing the phrase in quotes) and building your own sentence around it; punctuate and capitalize based on the sentence structure.
    
    **Example**: Medieval rulers often used “whatever violence was necessary” to maintain order in the realm (McGlynn 54).
  - **FULL-SENTENCE TAG**: write your complete sentence to set up the main idea in the quoted passage; the full-sentence tag is followed by a colon, and the first word of the quoted text is capitalized.
    
    **Example**: Historian Sean McGlynn explains how medieval monarchs were expected to maintain order: “The monarch...was expected to employ whatever violence was necessary in pursuit of social stability and safety for his subjects” (54).

- **PARAPHRASE**: rewriting another’s ideas or information into your own words (of about the same length as the original passage); requires a lead-in passage (to make it clear where the paraphrased passage begins) and a parenthetical citation (to make it clear where the paraphrased passage ends).

  **Example**: A medieval ruler used dreadful punishments to protect his subjects and keep them in line, and his subjects accepted this policy (McGlynn 54).

- **SUMMARY**: re-telling or condensing work done by another, in your own words; requires a lead-in passage (to make it clear where the summary begins) and a parenthetical citation (to make it clear where the summary ends).

  **Example**: One historian states that medieval rulers punished criminals in violent, frightening ways to fight crime and maintain order. The rulers’ subjects expected and supported this kind of justice (McGlynn 54).

- **SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE**: an idea or information attributable to a writer or work

  **Example**: Trial by “water ordeal,” which operated on the premise that the innocent would sink while the guilty would float, is a practice that was legally established as far back as the late 12th century (McGlynn 55-56).

- **GENERAL/COMMON KNOWLEDGE**: information found in one or more sources and generally known—no citation needed.

  **Example**: Frequent wars, widespread disease, and institutionalized cruelty were just a few of the problems medieval societies faced.
Unique Situations

- **QUOTE WITHIN A QUOTE**: the entire passage is placed within quotation marks, and the internal quote has ‘single’ quotation marks:
  
  **Example**: Horace Mann’s article notes, “He coined the phrase ‘the great equalizer’ when discussing the merits of education” (123).
  
  In the original source, Mann uses quotation marks around “the great equalizer.”

- **ELLIPSIS**: the three dots with spaces (. . .) are used at the beginning or end of a quote, if the quote is not the author’s complete sentence. Always use an ellipsis when breaking a quote or skipping words when using a blended sentence.
  
  **Examples**:  
  ▪ Thomas Jefferson wrote, “. . . men are created equal.” (information cut from the beginning)  
  ▪ Thomas Jefferson wrote, “All . . . are created equal.” (information cut from the middle)  
  ▪ Thomas Jefferson wrote, “All men are created . . .” (information cut from the end)

- **EDITORIAL CHANGES**: whenever you make a change in a direct quote, indicate the change with [square brackets]
  
  **Adding Clarification**: Sources reveal, “He [Michael Moore] is an award-winning filmmaker” (Jones 12).
  
  **Noting Errors**: “The playwright [sic] . . .”  
  [sic] indicates that a copied word has been quoted exactly as it was in the original text.
  
  **Changing uppercase/lowercase**: Sources show, “[T]wenty-five percent is the maximum amount of research to include in a paper” (Milecki 87).

- **QUOTED IN**: when quoting a source that is already being quoted by the author of the source, give credit in the tag phrase to the person who actually spoke the words; then, in your parenthetical citation, add the phrase “qtd. in” to show where you got this quote (as it’s not from the original source).
  
  **Example**: Thomas Paine claims, “We have it in our power to begin the world all over again” (qtd. in D’Souza 769).  
  
  The Works Cited entry would list D’Souza, not Paine.

- **LONG/BLOCK QUOTES**: these quotes follow a different format per MLA. For any quote over 4 typed lines, indent the entire quote, do not use quotation marks around the direct quote, and put the end punctuation before the end citation (instead of after it). Always set up the quote with a tag or signal phrase.
  
  **Example**: Nelly Dean treats Heathcliff poorly and dehumanizes him throughout her narration:  
  They entirely refused to have it in bed with them, or even in their room, and I had no more sense, so, I put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it would be gone on the morrow. By chance, or else attracted by hearing his voice, it crept to Mr. Earnshaw’s door, and there he found it on quitting his chamber. (Bronte 78)
  
  ➢ Note that the period comes before the parenthetical citation.
  
  ➢ Each line of the quote has been indented.
  
  ➢ The tag phrase that introduces the quote is concluded with a colon.

**Reminders:**

- As a general rule, if you didn’t write it, you have to cite it.
- When quoting directly, be sure to copy down the passage character for character.
- If you need to change a word to make the quote fit your paper, use [square brackets] around the word or character.
- If you skip over a word, or even a sentence or two, indicate this edit with an ellipsis, i.e., . . .
- If you are worried about plagiarizing, cite the borrowed text while you write your paper. Never leave your citations to do last because you may forget, or you may be unable to find your source again.