

**Handout**  
**How and When to Quote**  
**Learning to Use and Incorporate Sources in Your Work**

**WHEN to Quote:**

- When you need to include “**primary**” data (i.e., something you will analyze).
- When you want to discuss “**key terms**” coined by another author.
- When the **specific words matter** to you (or to others) (e.g., a transcript of a deposition).
- When the **author’s words are so distinctive or compelling** that paraphrasing them would be difficult or a disservice to the reader.
- When you want to **dispute the source**.

Otherwise: PARAPHRASE!

**HOW to Quote:**

There are myriad ways in which writers may incorporate a source text. An experienced writer will use many of these strategies in any given work.

**1. Block Quotations are the least desirable. They are sometimes considered the sign of a lazy or inexperienced writer** (i.e., one who doesn’t have the energy or confidence to decide what the reader really needs to see). Block quotations should be reserved for long passages that you wish (and need) to examine in detail. Keep in mind that since MLA rules require that *more than* four typed lines of quoted prose be indented from the left margin, any quote longer than four lines *must be* presented as a blocked quotation.

**Note:** Block quotations should be introduced by an informative sentence and preceded by a colon or comma, but do *not* require quotation marks since the indented format telegraphs to the reader that this is an exact quote.

**Note:** Moreover, some research shows that readers often skip over block quotations. In fact, as you read assigned texts this semester, note: (i) how *infrequently* writers use block quotations, and (ii) how, if they do use a blocked quote, they usually employ an introductory sentence that identifies the original author and explains the upcoming content. For example, in his essay “The Trouble with Wilderness,” William Cronon introduces a block quotation with the following language: “Earth First! Founder Dave Foreman captures the familiar parable succinctly when he writes.”

**MLA tip:** in a block quotation, the parenthetical citation to the source goes *outside* the final punctuation mark (unlike in-text citations, where the period goes after the parenthetical).

**MLA tip:** if you want to indicate that you omitted part of a quote, you can use an *ellipsis mark* (i.e., three periods, with spaces in between). But note that if you want to omit a full sentence, you must use a period before the three ellipsis dots, and generally speaking, you should not use an ellipsis at the beginning or at the end of a quotation (unless words have been dropped at the end of the final quoted sentence). For more information, consult an MLA handbook.

**2. Full Sentence Quotation (without source attribution):** where the quoted sentence stands alone without any introductory information about the author or subject. *This is almost never done in an academic essay.* Instructors sometimes refer to this as a “hit and run” quotation or a “drop and run” quotation (which is not a good thing!).

**Example:** “Idealizing a distant wilderness too often means not idealizing the

environment in which we actually live, the landscape that for better or worse we call home” (Cronon 16).

**3. Full Sentence Quotation (with source attribution):** where the entire quoted sentence is included, but the writer includes information about the author to introduce the quote:

**Example:** As William Cronon, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, suggests, “Idealizing a distant wilderness too often means not idealizing the environment in which we actually live, the landscape that for better or worse we call home” (490).

**Note:** the above example assumes that this is the first mention of Cronon. Any subsequent attributions would include only his last name.

**MLA tip:** capitalize the first word of a quoted *sentence* but not the first word of a quoted *phrase*. (This is true even if the entire sentence is embedded in your own prose.)

**4. Partial Sentence Quotation (with explicit source attribution):** where a writer selects part of another author’s sentence and inserts it (along with the original author’s name and info) into his or her own prose.

**Example:** The problem with romanticizing the far-off wilderness, posits University of Wisconsin professor William Cronon, is that it means “not idealizing the environment in which we actually live, the landscape that for better or worse we call home” (490).

**5. Partial Sentence Quotation (with implied source attribution):** where a writer selects part of another author’s sentence and inserts it into his or her own prose without naming the original author except in the in-text parenthetical citation.

**Example:** The problem with romanticizing the far-off wilderness is that it means “not idealizing the environment in which we actually live, the landscape that for better or worse we call home” (Cronon 490).

**6. Paraphrasing a quotation (with explicit attribution):** where a writer paraphrases another author’s ideas and specifically give the other author credit.

**Example:** According to William Cronon, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, the problem with romanticizing the far-off wilderness is that such idealization ignores the environment in our own backyards (490).

**7. Paraphrasing a quotation (with implied attribution):** where a writer paraphrases another author’s ideas and provides attribution by way of an in-text citation.

**Example:** The problem with romanticizing the far-off wilderness is that such idealization ignores the environment in our own backyards (Cronon 490).

**FINAL NOTE:** Remember that even with a proper “in-text” citation, you must still properly list the source on your Works Cited page. Here is a proper MLA Works Cited entry for Cronon’s essay:

Cronon, William. “The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.”

*The Great New Wilderness Debate*, edited by J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, U of Georgia P, 1998, pp. 471-99.