Quotations

Don’t provide too many direct quotations. Many academic journals set a limit of two. You will not get any marks for including quotations – you didn’t write it so you can’t get credit for someone else’s work. Quotations take space you could have used for your own writing, which you could get credit for. If you put too many quotations into your work, you give the impression you are just filling it up because you couldn’t think of anything to say. When you do use a quotation, keep it as short as possible.

Turnitin is the university system which checks your written work for copying and scores it for originality. The more quotations you include, the worse your originality score.

There are only two valid reasons for including a direct quotation. Firstly, use a quotation if you want to discuss it and need to refer to the words used and it is short. If the quote is going to exceed one page, simply cite the version you are using so others can see it for themselves, or (better) shorten the quoted material to only what is essential. Secondly, use a quotation if it says something so perfectly you could not possibly do better (which is rarely the case).

It is always preferable to paraphrase a quotation with your own wording. Not only does this maintain originality, it demonstrates your understanding of the original quotation, which improves your marks.

If the quote is less than one line, include it in the paragraph. If the quote is longer than one line, place it in its own paragraph. You can skip portions of a text with ‘…’

EG: “To be or not….is the question.” (Shakespeare, p.234)

A quote must always provide the page number from which it is taken. If the quote spans more than one page, you must indicate the starting and ending page number. Each citation style has its own format for citing quotations, so ensure you follow the appropriate guidelines.

Sometimes you need to add some text to make a quote comprehensible. Such text is contained within square brackets.

EG: “It was said they [the leaders] didn’t care for these people.” (Straw, 2004, p. 112)

You can place critical portions of a quote in italics in order to draw the reader’s attention to them, but you must indicate these are your italics with “my italics”, and did not occur in the original.

EG: “It was said by the opposition that the government was weak.” (Straw, 2004, p. 213) (my italics)

Alternatives to direct quotes

It is considered preferable to paraphrase or summarise than to quote. Paraphrasing involves putting the quote into your own words. Summarizing involves putting the main idea into your own words, focusing on the truly important aspects. Not only does this avoid copyright issues, it demonstrates you understand the material. Summarising is preferable to paraphrasing because it demonstrates a deeper level of comprehension on your part than is necessary for paraphrasing.

You must cite any paraphrased or summarised material, but you do not have to provide page numbers.