

How Much to Quote

Beginning writers who struggle with quoting usually either making the mistake of quoting too little or quoting too much. It is difficult to find the appropriate balance of background, quotation, explanation, and of course, your own voice. Our class handout on paraphrase, summary, and quotation has some good guidelines for when and how much to quote that I expect you to be aware of. The "no more than 10 to 20 percent" rule that the handout discusses means that in a five page paper, if you were to take all of the quoted information and put it together, it shouldn't equal more than about half to three-quarters of a page.

Frame Every Quote

This means introducing each quote before you insert it into the text and then following it with an explanation. This process can take two or three sentences or more to achieve well. The importance of framing quotations is to avoid leaving your readers with the effect of what Graff and Birkenstein's text calls "the hit-and-run quotation." Your readers want to know where a quote came from, who said it, and why the source is particularly authoritative in relationship to your topic. This is particularly important the first time you introduce a new source in your essay. The first time you introduce an author, use his or her full name and mention the source. Following that first introduction, use only the author's last name. Your readers also want you to take a moment after the quote to explain how it supports either the topic of the paragraph or the thesis (claim) of your argument or essay. Much of this will become clear as you practice with some of the writing prompts below.

Try It!

Use as many of the following templates, from Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say/I Say*, as you need to help you integrate your sources into your essay.

If a particular prompt makes you want to write more, keep writing. If you aren't inspired by one prompt, try another. The important thing here is that you work on developing an academic voice in your writing and the templates are one way to get started.

You may want to try following each of the *Templates for Introducing Quotations* with one of the *Templates for Explaining Quotations*. Choose from any of the sources that you've gathered for this essay, and feel free to alter any of the templates as needed.

Templates for Introducing Quotations

- X states, " _____ ."
- As X puts it, " _____ ."
- According to X, " _____ ."
- X writes, " _____ ."

- In his article _____, X maintains that "_____."
- In X's view, "_____."
- X agrees when he writes "_____."
- X disagrees when he writes "_____."
- X complicates matters further when he writes "_____."
- X clarifies matters further when he writes "_____."

Templates for Explaining Quotations

There are fewer templates for "explaining" than there are for "introducing." It's okay to reuse some of these more than once "as-is" or you can also try visiting the "Active Verbs for Discussing Ideas" link on the "Style Help" page of our course blog to try some different verb choices.

- Essentially, X is saying _____ .
- In other words, X believes _____ .
- In making this comment, X argues that _____ .
- Here, X is insisting that _____ .
- X's point is that _____ .
- The essence of X's argument is that _____ .

Some notes about formatting: Periods and commas go inside quotation marks. Colons and semi-colons go on the outside. Also, titles of articles should appear in quotations, while titles of books or periodicals should either be underlined or italicized.

Believing and Doubting, Agreeing and Disagreeing

In our chapters on critical inquiry, you tried some exercises that involved adopting “believing” or “doubting” the sources to which you were responding. Now it is important for you to decide whether or not you agree or disagree with the sources that will support your argument or proposal. It’s likely that you won’t completely agree or disagree with any particular source. Try some of the following prompts to help you respond to the ideas presented in your sources.

DISAGREE AND EXPLAIN WHY

In argumentative writing, it is not merely enough to disagree, you need to explain why. Graff and Birkenstein provide some insight into what some of those reasons for disagreeing might be: (1) "because another's argument fails to take relevant factors into account," (2) "because it is based on faulty or incomplete evidence" (3) "because it rests on questionable assumptions [or *warrants*]" (4) "because it used flawed logic, is contradictory, or overlooks what you take to be the real issue."

Templates for disagreeing with reasons:

- I think X is mistaken because he/she overlooks _____ .
- X's claim that _____ rests upon the questionable assumption that _____ .
- I disagree with X's view that _____ because, as recent research (or, as Y has recently pointed out), _____ .
- X contradicts him-/herself. On one hand he/she argues _____ . But on the other hand, he/she also says _____ .
- By focusing on _____ , X overlooks the deeper problem of _____ .
- X claims _____ , but we don't need him to tell us that. Anyone familiar with _____ has long known that _____ .
- X overlooks the important point that _____ .
- My own view is that what X insists is a _____ is in fact a _____ .

AGREE--BUT WITH A DIFFERENCE

Even when you agree with another's views, in argumentative writing, it is still important (perhaps more important) to distinguish what you say from what they say by adding something fresh or unique to the conversation. You can achieve this by elaborating on what others have to say and by bringing in related ideas. Graff and Birkenstein offer the following strategies for striving beyond agreement in your writing to bring something more to the table: (1) "You may point out some unnoticed evidence or line of reasoning that supports X's claims that X herself hasn't mentioned." (2) You may cite some corroborating personal experience, or a situation not mentioned by X that her views help readers understand." (3) You might offer "an explanation for readers" who are not as informed as you are on the issue. Remember, you have become somewhat of an expert compared to your readers, as you have been busy researching your topic. Essentially, what you're trying to achieve here is a contribution to the existing conversation "by pointing out unnoticed implications or explaining something that needs to be better understood," Graff and Birkenstein explain.

Templates for Agreeing:

- I agree that _____ because my experience _____ confirms it.
- X is surely right about _____ because, as he/she may not be aware, recent studies have shown that _____ .
- X's theory of _____ is extremely useful because it sheds insight on the difficult problems of _____ .
- I agree that _____ , a point that needs emphasizing since so many people believe _____ .
- Those unfamiliar with this school of thought may be interested to know that it basically boils down to _____ .
- I agree that _____ , a point that needs emphasizing since so many people believe _____ .
- If group X is right that _____ , as I think they are, then we need to reassess the popular assumption that _____ .
- I wholeheartedly endorse what X calls _____ .
- These conclusions, which X discusses in _____ , add weight to the argument that _____ .

AGREE AND DISAGREE SIMULTANEOUSLY

Agreeing and disagreeing simultaneously, as Graff and Birkenstein explain, enables your readers to distinguish your views from the views of others presented in your argument "while still keeping your argument sufficiently complex." They also note that, in comparison with sole agreement or disagreement, this option "can be tipped subtly toward agreement or disagreement, depending on where you lay your stress."

Templates for agreeing and disagreeing simultaneously:

- Although I agree with X up to a point, I cannot accept his/her overall conclusion that _____ .
- Although I disagree with what much of X says, I fully endorse his final conclusion that _____ .
- Though I concede that _____ , I still insist that _____ .
- X is right that _____ , but he/she seems on more dubious ground when he/she claims that _____ .
- While X is probably wrong when he/she claims that _____ , he/she is right that _____ .
- Whereas X provides evidence that _____ , Y and Z's research on (or claims about) _____ and _____ convinces me that _____ instead.
- I'm of two minds about X's claim that _____ . On the one hand, I agree that _____ . On the other hand, I'm not sure if _____ .
- My feelings on the issue are mixed. I do support X's position that _____ , but I find Y's argument about _____ and Z's research on (or claims regarding) _____ to be equally persuasive.