

How to use direct quotations as evidence

Academic Skills Quick Guide

Knowing how to use direct quotations as evidence will help you **practise academic integrity** and **demonstrate your understanding to the marker**. This guide offers an introduction and practical examples. Use this guide alongside the Quick Guide '[How to use direct quotations in your writing](#)'.

Blending direct quotations into your writing

To use direct quotes effectively, as evidence, it is important to **blend** them into your writing. At a minimum, this involves inserting direct quotations into a sentence. However, the key is to **introduce** a direct quotation **before** it is actually included in your writing and then **unpack** it for the reader (marker). Doing this turns the direct quotation into a good piece of evidence, to back up your point for the paragraph.

Introducing quotations will help you to:

- clearly show the reader (marker) you have included others' words in your writing
- provide a smooth reading path for the reader by naming the author and identifying the subject of the direct quotation
- include your judgement of the expertise of the author or the credibility of the source.

Unpacking a direct quotation after it has been inserted into your writing will help you to link the ideas/information in the quotation to the rest of the paragraph, and **demonstrate your understanding to the marker**.

Unpacking quotes usually involves:

- explaining the meaning of the direct quotation
- evaluating the claims contained in the direct quotation
- applying the concepts or ideas offered in the direct quotation.

It is especially important to blend direct quotations into your writing because you are using **others' words**.

Introducing and **unpacking** direct quotations will help you to blend others' **words** and **ideas** with your own, in a way that:

- makes your writing clear and easy to read
- clearly shows where your work ends and another's work begins
- demonstrates your understanding
- adds your ideas and judgements
- helps you use sources as evidence.

Techniques for introducing direct quotations

Introducing direct quotations is an important part of academic writing.

There are four key techniques used to introduce direct quotations:

1. name the author
2. use a reporting verb
3. identify the expertise of the author, and/or the credibility of the source
4. indicate the general subject of the direct quotation (what it is about).

Introducing direct quotations by naming the author

The most common technique used to introduce direct quotations involves naming the author of the quote. Naming the author before inserting the direct quotation into the sentence shows the reader (marker) you are using others' words in your writing.

Examples

Example one: direct quotation without 'introduction'

"new media has the potential to be used to generate new meanings, values, relationships, and personal identities" (Dodge & Brown, 2012, p. 21).

Example two: direct quotation with 'introduction'

Dodge and Brown (2012) say "new media has the potential to be used to generate new meanings, values, relationships, and personal identities" (p. 21).

Example 1 (above) is hard to understand and the quote is not used effectively. This is because the quote has not been 'introduced'.

Example 2 (above) highlights how naming the author introduces the direct quotation and:

- clearly shows others' words are being used
- improves sentence structure
- makes it easier for the reader to understand.

Introducing direct quotations by using a reporting verb

In academic writing reporting verbs are used to **describe** and **report on** others' work. Reporting verbs can be used to characterise the source and the claims made by the author in the work. This means reporting verbs can be an effective way to **demonstrate your understanding**, and **include your judgements**.

Commonly used reporting verbs:

state(s), contend(s), insist(s), discovered, agree(s), report(s), maintain(s), theorize(s), argue(s), find(s), hypothesise(s), suggest(s), propose(s), reveal(s), explain(s), define(s), discuss(es), outline(s), reveal(s).

Detailed guidance about reporting verbs is provided in the Quick Guide '[Using reporting verbs to introduce evidence](#)'.

Examples

Example one

Dodge and Brown (2012) **say** "new media has the potential to be used to generate new meanings, values, relationships, and personal identities" (p. 21).

Example two

Dodge and Brown (2012) **insist** "new media has the potential to be used to generate new meanings, values, relationships, and personal identities" (p. 21).

In the second example (above), the verb 'insist' characterises the author claims as being forcefully made, and biased (without balance or consideration for the possibility of alternative view).

Example three

Dodge and Brown (2012) **reveal** "new media has the potential to be used to generate new meanings, values, relationships, and personal identities" (p. 21).

In the third example (above), the verb 'reveal', characterises the source as objective, and author claims as uncovering pre-existing phenomena.

In the last two examples the writer has used reporting verbs effectively to characterise and make judgements about the source, and the types of claims made by the authors.

Carefully selecting reporting verbs can help you to:

- introduce sources more effectively (blending them into your writing)
- demonstrate your understanding
- add in your judgements about sources and author claims.

Introducing direct quotations by indicating the general subject of the quote (what it is about)

Noting the **general subject** of a direct quotation is an important way to introduce and blend others' words into your writing. Doing this 'sets up' the direct quotation for the reader, and makes your assignment much easier to understand.

Example

Dodge and Brown (2012) **explore possible impacts of blogs, online gaming, and computer games**, contending "new media has the potential to be used to generate new meanings, values, relationships, and personal identities" (p. 21)

In this example (above) the writer indicates the **general subject** of the direct quotation in order to better blend others' words. This technique works by moving from the **general** to the **specific**. The **general subject** of the direct quotation is noted, and then the **specific words** from the source are included.

Introduce direct quotations by identifying the expertise of the author and/or credibility of the source

When using an important source for the **first time** in an assignment, it is usual to establish the **expertise of the author**, and the **relevance and credibility of the source**.

This can be done by identifying:

- the expertise of the author in regard to your topic,
- the credibility of the source.

Examples

Example one

In their study about Australian media consumption over the last decade, media theorists, Dodge and Brown (2012, p. 21) contend "new media has the potential to be used to generate new meanings, values, relationships, and personal identities".

Example two

In their recent newspaper editorial, experienced media workers, Dodge and Brown (2012) contend “new media has the potential to be used to generate new meanings, values, relationships, and personal identities” (p. 21).

In both examples (above) the writer has:

- identified the expertise of the authors and
 - provided a subtle judgement about the credibility of the source.
1. Media theorists and media workers have **different types of expertise** about new media and its potential. By clearly identifying the expertise of the sources, the writer indicates the **nature and limits of author expertise**.
 2. By describing the type of source, the writer indicates **its credibility**. A scholarly study, reviewed by peers and based on rigorous research, is more credible than a newspaper editorial based on professional experience and personal opinion. Still, a newspaper editorial by experienced media workers has some credibility. Likewise, a credible scholarly study is still open to evaluation.

Establishing the expertise of authors and the credibility of sources used in your assignments is important for two main reasons. Doing so:

1. shows the marker you have used **expert opinion and credible sources** in assignments and this adds to the quality and credibility of your writing
2. establishes the **expertise of an author**, and the **credibility of sources**, and this **demonstrates your understanding**, and opens up space for **you to evaluate sources and add in your judgements** (when unpacking direct quotes).

Techniques for unpacking direct quotations included in your writing

When writing assignments at university, it is **your job to demonstrate your understanding**. Often, assignments also require students to demonstrate **critical thinking**. Using others' words (direct quotations) makes it harder to demonstrate your understanding and critical thinking. However, unpacking techniques can help overcome this challenge.

Unpacking a direct quotation involves explaining, evaluating, or applying it. Selecting relevant direct quotes from credible disciplinary sources is the first, crucial step. It is important never to assume the reader 'gets' the direct quote, or that its meaning is 'so obvious' it does not need unpacking. Treat direct quotations as a chance to further demonstrate your understanding to the reader (marker).

Unpack direct quotations by:

- explaining their meaning
- explaining their relevance to the point you are making in the paragraph
- applying (using) the ideas contained in the direct quotation to analyse an example, explain an issue, or solve a problem
- evaluating the ideas or claims contained in the direct quotation (to further develop your discussion).

Unpacking direct quotations blends the source into your writing in a way that adds **your ideas** and **judgements**. This is where you get to offer **your judgement** or **response** to the source.

Students often mistakenly feel it is 'too obvious' to explain or evaluate direct quotations. Remember, academic writing tends to be an obvious, direct, and repetitive style of writing. Also, when writing assignments and exams it **is your job to demonstrate your understanding**. Explaining, applying, and evaluating direct quotations will help you to improve the quality of your writing by adding in **your ideas** and **judgements**.

Prompts to help you unpack direct quotations

Use the prompts below to help you unpack quotations when drafting your assignments.

To explain a direct quotation:

- What is the direct quotation about? Does it add to the topic I am writing about?

- Why did I include this direct quotation? How does it illustrate (evidence) the point I am making in this paragraph?
- How are the ideas expressed in the quotation relevant to my topic/point? What does the direct quotation explain or clarify?

To evaluate a direct quotation:

- What are the strengths of the ideas and claims made in the quotation? How can the ideas or claims contained in the quotation be linked back to the point I am making in this paragraph?
- What are the limits or weaknesses of the ideas and claims made in the quotation? How can I link these limits or weaknesses to the point I am making in this paragraph?
- Are there other credible sources I have read that identify the strengths or weaknesses of the ideas and claims made in the quotation? Can I draw on these sources to evaluate the quotation and develop my point for the paragraph?

To apply (use) a direct quotation:

- What are the key ideas or approaches contained in the quotation? How are they relevant to my point in the paragraph?
- Can I use the ideas or approach contained in the quotation to develop my discussion in the rest of the paragraph?
- Can I use the ideas or approach contained in the quotation to analyse an example, explain an issue, or solve a problem?

Tips for blending direct quotations into your writing

- **ALWAYS reference** direct quotations in-text or in a footnote, and make sure the **wording is correct** (exactly matches the original source).
- **NEVER** start a paragraph with a direct quotation. If you start the paragraph with a quotation it means you have not 'topped' or 'introduced' it.
- **NEVER** finish a paragraph with a direct quotation. If you finish the paragraph with a quotation it means you have not 'tailed' or 'unpacked' it.

NEVER run quotes together one after the other. Doing this makes it hard to show your understanding, and detracts from the flow and clarity of your writing. This is because running quotes together one after the other means you are using large chunks of others' words, from sources likely written in a different style to your assignment.