

Academic Skills Quick Guide

Using direct quotations from sources is an important way to include, or blend, sources into your writing. Following academic writing conventions in your discipline about using quotes is an important part of **practising academic integrity** in your assignments. This guide offers an introduction. **Always** check with your teachers about rules in your discipline or area of study.

What is a direct quotation?

A direct quotation is a word-for-word extract from a source. Direct quotations are used to include the **words** (and ideas) from sources in your writing.

All direct quotations must to be referenced and have page numbers noted in in-text referencing if the source is paginated (e.g. has page numbers). Depending on the referencing style guide, there are rules to follow when quoting from a non-paginated source. For example, if using APA referencing style to reference a quote from a non-paginated electronic source indicate the paragraph the quote is taken from.

Examples

Short and long quotations are formatted differently in most referencing styles. Make sure you check the rules of the style you are using.

In **APA 6th referencing style**, short direct quotations (less than 40 words) are put into double inverted commas – “.....” – and inserted into a sentence.

Example one: a short direct quotation

Driscoll (2010, p. 21) argues recycling is “the least cost-effective way to reduce environmental damage caused by mass production and mass consumption”.

Example two: a long direct quotation

In **APA 6th referencing style**, long quotations (40 words and longer) are indented on both sides by 1.5cm and **not** enclosed in quotation marks.

Turner et al. (2010, p. 62) provide a good explanation of the way assignment writing at university involves drawing on and using relevant literature, or existing knowledge:

the most distinctive aspect of university education is the way it is linked to the literature. While assessment is structured to encourage a student to develop new ideas rather than repeat what is already known, it also demands that those ideas are developed from and related to the literature. Not surprisingly, rules and expectations have been established for how to use the literature in any piece of work. The rules are quite strict, although often there is a degree of variation between disciplines and even within disciplines.

Remember: Each referencing style has slightly different rules about how to use direct quotations.

Think of the referencing style guide as a **code book**, outlining the rules and conventions you need to follow. Edit your referencing against this ‘code book’ to avoid losing ‘easy marks’.

Are quotes an effective way to use sources in my assignments?

For students, the goal when writing assignments is to **demonstrate their understanding to the marker**.

Using paraphrases demonstrates a much higher level of skill and understanding than including a direct quotation. This is because paraphrasing requires you to understand the source well enough to put it into your own words. In contrast, direct quotations are **other people's words, making it more difficult to demonstrate your understanding**.

There are easy ways to show a higher level of skill and understanding and practise academic integrity when using direct quotations.

Make sure the quote is:

- relevant to the point you are making in the paragraph (e.g. it acts as relevant evidence)
- from a credible, current source
- blended into the rest of your writing (e.g. inserted into a sentence, introduced and unpacked)
- correctly formatted and referenced.

When should I use direct quotations?

In many (but not all) disciplines using direct quotations can be a very effective way to include the **words or ideas of credible sources** into your writing. However, as a general rule, students are expected to use direct quotations **sparingly** in assignments and exams.

This means you will use **only a couple** of direct quotations in most assignments, and the rest of the time you will use paraphrases and summaries to include sources in your writing. Sometimes students are not allowed to use direct quotations at all in their assignments (see more about disciplinary conventions below).

Three reasons to use direct quotations in assignments:

1. if the quotation itself is famous
2. you want to respond to the wording of the quote (e.g. agree/disagree with the wording of the claim)
3. when you need to include a precise statement of the nature or limits of a concept, principle or theory using an expert from the field.

Disciplinary conventions about using direct quotes

Disciplines and courses have different rules about the use of direct quotations in assignments.

- Often, in Social Sciences, Politics, Education, and Health and Human Sciences assignments quotations should make up **10% or less** of the word count.
- It is common in Environmental Science assignments for students to use **NO direct quotations at all**. Instead, students are expected to use paraphrases and summaries to include credible evidence in their writing.
- When analysing texts (e.g. novels, media sources etc.) Creative Writing and Media Studies students often include lots of direct quotations to **evidence their analysis**.
- Assignments about theoretical debates can mean most of the assignment is about different ways disciplinary experts define and apply concepts. In these types of assignments students may use quite a few direct quotations to define lots of theoretical concepts.

Always check the assignment description, marking criteria/rubric, and talk to your teacher about use of direct quotations in your assignments.