

Advanced Writing: Using Quotes Effectively Leads to Concise Language (MLA)

When I first taught my own children to use quotes, they used what I call **longer quotes**. However, as they progress, they begin to write more effectively by honing the way they use quotes and by writing more concisely.

Longer quotes typically begin with a “signal phrase,” followed by a comma, which introduces the quote, but it does not form a complete sentence. The quote should begin with a capital letter. And, of course, the direct quote should be surrounded by quotation marks and end with the in-text citation. The period goes outside of the citation.

Longer Quote with Signal Phrase (Beginner-Easy to Do)

He admits, “Not that I was not willing to let the captain have him, but I was very loth to sell the poor boy’s liberty, who had assisted me so faithfully in procuring my own” (Defoe 29).

Longer Quote Without Signal Phrase BUT Integrated as part of the sentence (Less easy to do)

Difference from above – **no comma** leading into the quote and the quote starts with a **lowercase letter**.

He admits that while it is “not that [he is] not willing to let the captain have him, but [he is] very loth to sell the poor boy’s liberty, who had assisted [him] so faithfully in procuring [his] own” (Defoe 29).

***The bracket [] indicates a change to the direct quote; this is necessary when integrating the quote as part of a complete sentence.

MLA Format, 9th Edition Website:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html OR <https://www.scribbr.com/mla/>

The Advanced Writer

Using longer quotes, for the *advanced writer*, should be the exception and not the rule. While using longer quotes does have its place, as students advance in their writing, using snippets of quotes is more effective and concise. Additionally, the portion being quoted should flow as a part of the sentence (no comma unless it grammatically needs one, and the quote starts with a lowercase letter unless the word requires capitalization as with the word I, etc.).

Do not fret if your student is not there yet. Learning to use quotes effectively and writing in a more concise manner takes practice. During high school, if students are mostly or only using “longer quotes,” that is absolutely ok! However, as he/she grows as a writer, their writing should, of course, improve. There are many nuances in writing and learning to write well is a process. Students will progress at different rates, and that is perfectly fine!

Examples, Longer vs. Shorter:

Longer: He boldly declares, “My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you” (Austen 185).

Shorter/Concise: He boldly declares his affections to Elizabeth and admits that he “admire[s] and love[s] [her]” (Austen 185).

The longer above has 23 words; the shorter/concise version has 15 words. In using a smaller portion of the quote, the sentence also became more concise.

Longer: At first, Collins ignores Elizabeth’s protest by reasoning it is some kind of joke. He explains, “It is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept” (Austen 104).

Shorter/Concise: Ignoring Elizabeth’s protest, he reasons young ladies often refuse marriage proposals “they secretly mean to accept” (Austen 104).

The longer above has 35 words; the shorter/concise version has 16 words. In using a smaller portion of the quote, the sentence also became more concise.

Longer: Furthermore, Swift attempts to call Ireland out on their apathetic attitude by stating, “Therefore whoever could find out a fair, cheap and easy method of making these children / sound and useful members of the commonwealth, would deserve so well of the public, as / to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation” (Swift, lines 12-14).

Shorter/Concise: Furthermore, Swift attempts to call Ireland out on their apathetic attitude by satirically offering a practical and productive plan to end homelessness by using words like “cheap and easy” (Swift, line 12) to appeal to their apathy.

Notice what is directly quoted here vs the original sentence.

Longer: When Wilber asks Charlotte, “Why did you do all this for me? I don't deserve it” (White 164). Charlotte responds by saying, “You have been my friend. That in itself is a tremendous thing” (White 164).

Shorter/Concise: Charlotte expresses it best when she calls a friend “a tremendous thing” (White 164).

Effective long quote **With Signal Phrase:**

After being rejected, Darcy says, ““Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?”” (Austen 188).

This part of Darcy’s proposal is worth quoting in its entirety. It makes a statement. But again, using a longer quote should be the exception.

Effective long quote **Without Signal Phrase:**

After being rejected, Darcy belittles Elizabeth when he speaks of her family's middle-class standing. He proceeds and questions if she expects him ““to congratulate [himself] on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath [his] own”” (Austen 188).

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