How to Use Quotations
Adapted from Chapter 6 in *Writing for Sociology* (2nd Edition)

Here are some reasons to quote from your sources:[1]

- **To provide support.** Cite as an appeal to authority, to bring the voices of experts into your paper.
- **To use vivid language.** Cite because the wording of the original source is clearer and more effective than any paraphrase you could write.
- **To represent the source fairly.** When you quote accurately and directly, no one can claim that you have misrepresented the source.
- **To enrich an argument.** Cite to interject controversy, for example, and show what's at stake in taking a position.

A good quotation is more than a random selection from a source. It says something significant or important enough to be quoted. Even if the idea is important, though, don't quote poor or unclear writing; instead paraphrase. The best passages to quote, then, are "quotable": both well-written and enlightening. Quotations serve as evidence or support, not as a substitute for your own ideas, arguments, or assertions. Here are some ways to integrate quotations into your own writing.

- **Give at least as much commentary on the quotation as the space the quotation takes up on the page.** So, a quotation taking up five lines or forty words should have a commentary roughly as long.
- **Introduce all quotations** so that the reader knows who is being quoted.
- **Comment or elaborate on your quotations.** Your reader must understand why you have chosen a particular passage to quote, why what it says that is significant, and what you want the reader to take from it.
- **Point out what is important about a quote** for the reader; don't assume that your reader will see the same significance you see in a quotation.

Introducing Quotations[2]

Introduce quotations to your reader. Quotations without introductions are called "dropped quotations."

Example of a dropped quotation: *Many readers are frustrated by reading Dante's Inferno. "The great Christian epic is a abbergasting work, crazily methodical, both sublime and grotesque, cruel, dismaying, a work that bursts the usual moral and literary categories" (Denby, Great Books, 229).*

Revised: *Many readers are frustrated by reading Dante's Inferno. When David Denby returned to Columbia to take "Great Books" again, he observed, "The great Christian epic is a abbergasting work, crazily methodical, both*

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[1] This section adapted from the *Skidmore Guide to Writing.* Available at:
http://cms.skidmore.edu/writing_guide/index.cfm.
[2] This section adapted from the State University of New York at Geneseo's Writing Guide. Available at:
http://writingguide.geneseo.edu/.

sublime and grotesque, cruel, dismaying, a work that bursts the usual moral and literary categories" (Denby, Great Books, 229).

Formatting Quotations[3]

For a quotation within a quotation, use single quotation marks. For example:

The new head of General Motors is cautiously optimistic about the influence the resurgent U.S. auto industry can have on the entire domestic economy, according to a recent Time magazine story: "All told, GM's Smith estimates, the recovering industry is now strong enough to add 1.5%--$20 billion—to the nation's gross domestic product in the last quarter of this year. 'It's been a long time, but you always thought of the U.S. auto industry as the engine of economic recoveries in the 1950s and 60s,' says Smith. 'I think we could be that kind of locomotive again.'"

Also Keep in Mind

- Quotations of four or more typewritten lines should be set off from your text in single spacing and indented in their entirety, generally 5 or 10 spaces from the left margin, with no quotation marks at beginning or end.

- Use an ellipsis (...) only when it is not obvious that you are quoting only a portion of the whole.

- Within quotations, use square brackets [ ] to add your own clarification, comment, or correction. For example, the material enclosed in square brackets in the following sentence was added to clarify the quotation: *"He [Hamlet] changes significantly after seeing Fortinbras and his army."*

- Use [sic], which is Latin for "in this manner," to indicate that a mistake or problem of some sort is in the original material you are quoting and is not a mistake you introduced in your transcription.

- Place commas and periods inside the closing quotation marks, but all other punctuation mark—such as semicolons, colons, exclamation points and question mark—go outside the closing quotation marks except when they are part of the quoted material.

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[3] This section adapted from the University of Wisconsin, "Writing Across the Curriculum." Available at: http://mendota.english.wisc.edu/~WAC/.