

## Quoting and Paraphrasing in an Essay

Whether you are being asked to write a research paper, a textual analysis, or a profile essay, you will likely need to include both **direct quotes and paraphrased information** from sources you found while conducting your research. You may use **quotes** and **paraphrased information** in a number of ways: to provide **evidence for your claims**, to **analyze** (or break down and interpret) the claims of others, and to **synthesize** — or combine — your own ideas with the ideas you found while doing your research.

It is important to include enough **evidence** from the texts you are **citing** that you avoid making unsubstantiated claims (claims without enough supporting evidence). At the same time, it is important to choose the **most appropriate quotes** — to illustrate and provide evidence for the **precise points** you want to make.

It is also important to quote and paraphrase correctly in order to avoid **plagiarizing**. This handout gives advice for choosing and incorporating quotes, using the **MLA citation style**.

### A Multi-Step Process

It can be helpful to approach selecting and synthesizing quotes as a multi-step process.

1. Formulate a **claim**, or **topic sentence**, that you need to support with evidence from your research. In other words, **decide what you want to say**.

2. Carefully choose the **source material** that you will be **quoting** or **paraphrasing**, to back up your claim.

3. Incorporate the source material with the necessary **signal phrase** and/or **parenthetical citation**. Make sure you are using **quotation marks** correctly.

4. Write a **tie-back**, or passage of analysis, that links the **source** you have included to your **claim**, and explains how this claim supports the **main point** of your essay.

5. Create a **bibliographic entry** for the source, to include on your **Works Cited** page.

## Step 1 — Deciding What you Want to Say

Imagine that you are writing a **textual analysis** essay about *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, by Angela Duckworth. (This book is the 2021/22 Common Read at the University of Idaho).

**After a careful reading** of the text, you have formulated **an idea** that you want to illustrate in your essay. Now, you need to support your idea using **evidence from *Grit***.

**Your idea:** students perform better in college if they choose a major that interests them.

## Step 2 — Selecting Source Material to Quote or Paraphrase

**You believe that there are several passages in *Grit*** that support your idea, but you are pretty sure there is one in particular that backs it up with **research-based evidence** (providing research-based evidence is important whenever possible, because it shows that a claim has been tested, rather than resting on an unsupported opinion).

A general **rule of thumb** is that an essay should be **90% your own words, and 10% quotes from sources**. This means that you should be careful to choose only quotes that **directly address the points you want to make**. It can be tempting to open up your book, and decide to include the first seemingly relevant quote you come across — even if a different one would make your essay stronger. This is why it is so important to **take careful notes** while you are doing your **research!** (For more information on this, see our Writing Center handout, **Note-taking for Research Papers**, which can be found on the resources page!)

**In this case, you have taken good notes**, and so you find the **perfect passage** to illustrate your point on pages 97-98 of *Grit*.

**The passage:** “Second, people *perform* better at work when what they do interests them. This is the conclusion of another meta-analysis of sixty studies conducted over the past sixty years. Employees whose intrinsic personal interests fit with their occupations do their jobs better, are more helpful to their coworkers, and stay at their jobs longer. College students whose personal interests align with their major earn higher grades and are less likely to drop out” (Duckworth 97-98).

### Step 3 — Incorporating the Source Material

**There are several ways this can be done** — and so here the process gets a bit more creative. You may use part of the quote, and paraphrase the rest; you might want to paraphrase almost entirely, and only quote a few words directly from the source; or you might want to quote an entire passage from beginning to end.

**When you quote**, you use the **exact words** found in the source material, **enclosed in quotation marks**. (“”) You will want to introduce the quote using your own words, so that the reader has context to understand it. Your words should flow logically into the text of the quote. You should check to make sure the **tense is consistent** throughout.

**When you paraphrase**, you transform a passage from someone else’s text into your own words. Although a lot of people like this option, it can be difficult to not accidentally **plagiarize** (steal someone else’s words) or “**patchwrite**” (mix too many of someone else’s words in with a few of your own) while paraphrasing.

A **signal phrase** is a series of words that come before your quote, and indicate who wrote it and/or where it comes from. A **parenthetical citation** can perform the same function, and will include a page number whenever one is known. Both a signal phrase and a parenthetical citation should allow a reader to **connect** the quote to a **bibliographic entry on your Works Cited page**.

**Regardless of which approach you choose, you NEED either a signal phrase or a parenthetical citation to avoid plagiarizing.**

### **Example 1**

**You decide** to decide to paraphrase the first part of the quote, before quoting directly from Duckworth at the end.

**Using a signal phrase:** In Chapter 6 of *Grit*, psychologist and author Angela Duckworth cites research to illustrate the idea that students perform better in college when they choose a major that interests them. Duckworth explains, “College students whose personal interests align with their major earn higher grades and are less likely to drop out” (97-98).

**Using a parenthetical citation:** Studies have shown that students perform better in college when they choose a major that interests them: “College students whose personal interests align with their major earn higher grades and are less likely to drop out” (Duckworth 97-98).

### **Punctuating Direct Quotes: *Colons and Commas***

If both the quote and your introduction are **complete sentences**, use a **colon**:

Duckworth cites research to illustrate this idea: “College students whose personal interests align with their major earn higher grades and are less likely to drop out” (97-98).

If either the quote or your introduction is *not* a complete sentence, use a **comma**:

Duckworth notes, “College students whose personal interests align with their major earn higher grades and are less likely to drop out” (97-98).

## **Example 2**

**You are going to paraphrase** the quote almost entirely, and use only a few of Duckworth’s words. While paraphrasing, **avoid keeping the original sentence structure** and simply **substituting synonyms** for the author’s words — as this is likely to lead to **accidental plagiarism**.

**Using a signal phrase:** In Chapter 6 of *Grit*, psychologist and author Angela Duckworth cites studies which show that college students earn higher grades when they choose a major that they find personally interesting. They are also less likely to drop out (97-98).

**Using a parenthetical citation:** Studies have shown that college students earn higher grades when they choose a major that they find personally interesting. They are also less likely to drop out (Duckworth 97-98).

## **Example 3**

**You decide** that you want to broaden the scope of your point, and include the **whole quote** in your essay. Because it is more than four lines long, you need to **indent the quote five spaces in from the left margin**. You do not need quotation marks.

**If you need to**, you can **remove a word or sentence** from a quote in order to make it fit more smoothly into your essay — as long as you **are very careful not to change the quote’s overall meaning**.

Indicate any words you have removed with an **ellipsis**: ...

If you need to **add a word** in order for a quote to make sense, then you can put it in **brackets: [like this]**. And again — be careful not to change the quote’s **meaning!**

**Using a signal phrase:**

Feeling passionate about your work or field of study pays off in the end. In Chapter 6 of *Grit*, Angela Duckworth explains,

...people *perform* better at work when what they do interests them. This is the conclusion of another meta-analysis of sixty studies conducted over the past sixty years. Employees whose intrinsic personal interests fit with their occupations do their jobs better, are more helpful to their coworkers, and stay at their jobs longer. College students whose personal interests align with their major earn higher grades and are less likely to drop out. (97-98)

**Using a parenthetical citation:**

Feeling passionate about your work or field of study pays off in the end:

...people *perform* better at work when what they do interests them. This is the conclusion of another meta-analysis of sixty studies conducted over the past sixty years. Employees whose intrinsic personal interests fit with their occupations do their jobs better, are more helpful to their coworkers, and stay at their jobs longer. College students whose personal interests align with their major earn higher grades and are less likely to drop out. (Duckworth 97-98)

When you are indenting a block quote, the period comes **before** the in-text citation.  
... are less likely to drop out. (Duckworth 97-98)

In all other cases, it comes **after**:  
... are less likely to drop out" (Duckworth 97-98).

## Step 4 — The Tie-Back, or Synthesis

To **synthesize** is to **combine** a number of different things into a **coherent whole**. In this case, you need to combine the quote you have used from *Grit* with your own analysis — in a way that helps your audience link it to the larger points being made in your essay. You need your audience to understand the quote's **purpose**.

**Imagine that the thesis of your essay is:** *though students are often advised to pursue practical majors, they may actually end up happier, and more successful, if they choose a major that aligns with their personal interests.*

### Example of Synthesis

Many students have received the advice to pursue practical majors, rather than majors they are passionate about; but this may not always pay off in the end. Studies have shown that students perform better in college when they choose a major that interests them: “College students whose personal interests align with their major earn higher grades and are less likely to drop out” (Duckworth 98). When students earn degrees in fields they find interesting, they will also be more prepared to apply for jobs in those fields — and research has shown this can pay off as well. Duckworth explains, “Employees whose intrinsic personal interests fit with their occupations do their jobs better, are more helpful to their coworkers, and stay at their jobs longer” (Duckworth 98).

The many examples of successful people, or “Grit Paragons,” that Duckworth shares throughout her book, further illustrate the idea that people who pursue their passions in work and school end up happier and more successful.

## Step 5 — Creating a Bibliographic Entry

For **EVERY** source that you **quote** or **paraphrase**, you need to create a **bibliographic entry**, which you will include on the **Works Cited** page at the very end of your essay.

**Remember:** the **in-text** citations and **signal phrases** you have used throughout your essay should easily direct a reader to the correct **bibliographic entry** on your **Works Cited page**.

### Example of an MLA style bibliographic entry for the 2016 edition of *Grit*

#### **Bibliographic entry:**

Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. Scribner, 2016.

#### **Conclusion**

**A well-chosen quote**, or the **perfect paraphrased claim**, will strengthen your arguments, help illustrate your ideas, and even improve the flow of your essay.

**Making sure to cite properly** at all times will help readers learn more about the claims you make, and allow you to **avoid plagiarism**.

In short, learning to **quote and paraphrase well** is an essential part of learning to write strong, clear, and well-researched essays at the college level!



## **Acknowledgments**

This handout was inspired in part by the University of Nevada Las Vegas Writing Center's presentation on *Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing*.