

Strategies for Embedding Quotations

In most forms of academic writing, direct quotations cannot stand alone as their own sentences. Instead, they need to be **embedded** into your own sentences so that they flow naturally within the writing. This handout describes the three main strategies for embedding quotations. One way to add variety to your writing is to use all three of these strategies from time to time as you write.

If you would like guidance on how to cite your direct quotations using MLA format, see our handout on MLA Documentation Style.

Strategy 1: Use a signal phrase

A **signal phrase** includes the author's name and a **signal verb** such as writes, claims, argues, or contends (there are dozens of signal verbs to choose from; an extensive list can be found at the University of Illinois Springfield's "The Learning Hub": <https://www.uis.edu/cas/wp-content/uploads/sites/161/2013/03/Signal-Verbs-PUBLISHED-Fall-2017.pdf>). When choosing a signal verb, make sure that the verb fits with your context (for example, don't use "writes" if the source is a video; don't use "says" if the source is written).

Signal phrases are most commonly placed before the quotation to immediately make it clear to readers who the author is. However, they can occasionally be placed after the quotation or even in the middle of it (if there's a natural pause in the quotation) to add some variety to your writing. Examples:

Sheffield writes, "We need change, and we need it now" (5).

"We need change, and we need it now" (5), Sheffield writes.

"We need change," Sheffield writes, "And we need it now" (5).

"According to (author)" is another common signal phrase. Example: **According to Sheffield, "We need change, and we need it now" (5).**

Notice the punctuation and capitalization. Follow signal phrases with a comma (unless they come at the end of your sentence), and capitalize the first word of the quotation. If you place your signal phrase after or in the middle of the quotation, end the quotation with a comma (even if that was the end of the author's sentence).

Also, notice that commas and periods go inside quotation marks UNLESS the quotation is followed by an in-text citation, in which case the comma or period is placed after the citation. Example:

Bates writes, "The results are inconclusive."

One author writes, "The results are inconclusive" (Bates).

Strategy 2: Use a complete sentence + a colon

Colons can be used to introduce quotations if you precede the colon with a complete sentence. Examples:

Crisis is on the horizon: "We need change, and we need it now" (Sheffield 5).

Lemonade continues to be the best-selling beverage during summer: "There is nothing better than a cold drink on a hot day" (Owens).

People do not just use one way of speaking: "Speakers often adapt their dialect to different situations" (Higgins 56).

An advanced variant of this strategy is to basically merge this strategy with the signal phrase strategy above so that you include the author's name in the complete sentence. You can accomplish this by placing a noun **in apposition** to the quotation. What this means is that there needs to be a noun somewhere BEFORE the colon that identifies the quotation. See these examples:

Sheffield makes the following statement: “We need change, and we need it now” (5).

Sheffield makes a bold claim: “We need change, and we need it now” (5).

Sheffield gives a strong warning: “We need change, and we need it now” (5).

In these examples, the nouns “statement,” “claim,” and “warning” are in apposition to the quotation because they describe what the quotation is—in other words, they are another name for “quotation.” A good rule of thumb to determine if you’ve used this strategy correctly is to see if you could replace the colon with the phrase “and that ____ is,” where the blank is filled in with your noun in apposition. Examples:

Sheffield makes the following statement (and that statement is) “We need change, and we need it now” (5).

Sheffield makes a bold claim (and that claim is) “We need change, and we need it now” (5).

Sheffield gives a strong warning (and that warning is) “We need change, and we need it now” (5).

Once again, notice that we capitalize the first word of the quotation when using this strategy.

Strategy 3: Work the quotation into the grammar of your sentence

It is often a good idea to word your sentence so that the quotation can naturally fit into the sentence without having the sudden interruption of a signal phrase or colon. See these examples:

It is an inconvenient fact that “we need change, and we need it now” (Sheffield 5).

Some species of chickens are “more prone to illness than others” (Hernandez 36).

When we discuss “the natural process of writing” (Adams 4), what do we really mean?

Notice that in all of these examples, the writer has found a way to smoothly incorporate the quotation into her sentence. The word “that” can often help you achieve this.

Also, notice that when using this strategy, the first word of the quotation is NOT capitalized as it is when using the other two strategies.