

Quotes: 10 tips

The principal use of quotation marks is to enclose the exact words of a writer or speaker. In every paragraph you will include three to five quotes.

Rule No. 1: (a sentence)

A colon is used to formally introduce a quotation or reported speech. The full stop should be placed outside the closing quotation mark. For example:

- » In his address to the jurors, Atticus Finch said: “Our courts have their faults, as does any human institution, but in this country our courts are the great levellers, and in our courts all men are created equal”.
- » Najaf uses a metaphor to compare the cut on his leg to a plough: “The flesh of my leg has been torn open in the way that a plough cuts through the earth”.

Rule No. 2: (a sentence)

A comma is sufficient if the introduction is less formal and the quotation consists of a single sentence:

- » Old Major said, “All the habits of Man are evil”.

Rule No. 3: (two sentences)

If the quotation consists of two or more complete sentences, the colon should always be used. For example:

- » In his opening speech, Old Major decrees: “And above all, no animal must ever tyrannise over his own kind. Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers”.

Rule No. 4: (phrases and sentence fragments)

If relevant, embed a reference to a narrative device.

- » The personified reference to the wind that “stole quietly away to renew its knowing laughter” accentuates the disruptive nature of the father’s personality.
- » Najaf refers to the setting of the “crowded hospital ward” to show the inadequacy of the health care system.

Rule No. 5: (subject and object)

If the quotation is grammatically related to the sentence in which it appears—for example, it is the subject or object — no colon is needed. For example:

- » ‘Sit down and shut up’ was all he could say. (The quote is the subject of the sentence.)
- » Her question was ‘Why should I?’. (The quote is the object of the sentence.)
- » Please note: The following quotation is incorrect because it is not the subject of the sentence: ‘It caused me to gasp and sweat and grit my teeth all through the day and night’ emphasises how much pain Najaf was going through.
- » Reword the sentence: The reference to the fact that it caused Najaf to “gasp and sweat and grit [his] teeth all through the day and night” reinforces the pain.

Rule No. 6: (a phrase or sentence fragment)

If quoting a phrase(s), or part of a sentence, ensure that the quote fits the grammatical construction of your sentence.

- » Incorrect: Ms O'Brien uses figurative language when she states "plough into trees".
- » Correct: Ms O'Brien uses figurative language when she states that "cars don't normally plough into trees".
- » Ahn Do states that his father's "bravery in the face of extreme danger was breathtaking".
- » Ahn Do depicts a nerve-racking scene in which his father "walked into the remote re-education camp dressed as a high-ranking communist officer".

Rule No. 7: (multiple words or phrases)

If you quote multiple words or phrases, and if they share a subject, these must be the same part of speech.

- » The editor uses negatively-charged verbs such as "rammed", (verb) "scuttled" (verb) and "hijacked" (verb) to describe the activists' fervour.
- » Ahn Do said his mother was "stunned" and "delighted" to see her brothers after they walked free from the "remote re-education camp".

Rule No. 8: (long quotes)

Do not try to squeeze a lengthy phrase(s) or clause into your sentence. It may lead to awkward grammar.

- » Najaf concludes with the idea that "this attempt to see into the mystery of things had one benefit for I realised that a man is not what he thinks, nor what he says, but what he does with his hands and legs and with his heart" which means that it is not possible to understand "God's plans" in all its "wonder and beauty".

Rule No.9: (sentence fragments)

If possible, avoid rewriting the author's words or phrases. You may need to construct your sentence around the quote.

- » Sentence 1: By thinking of "God's plan for [him]", he tells himself " "Najaf [he] thought, "if you cannot use your legs, at least use your mind", but it is also difficult to see "God's creation in all of its wonder and beauty"
- » Sentence 2: Najaf realises that "God's creation in all of its wonder and beauty" is difficult to understand.

Rule No. 10: (use dashes)

A pair of dashes may be used to mark off a parenthetical element which introduces additional information or an explanation. It can also be used to make a change in the structure of a sentence.

- » The editor also quotes a figure — "seven million animals" — to draw attention to the magnitude of the problem.
- » MacLeod uses personification — the wind "succeeded in entering this single room" and "stole quietly away" — to depict the random and chaotic nature of the father's bedroom.

6. Place quotes in a narrative context

You must weave at least four to six quotes throughout each paragraph to prove your point. If you can improve your quoting skills, you will improve the quality of your writing.

Avoid stringing a list of quotes together; you will end up summarising the story.

James writes: “Kill the pig! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!” This quote shows the savage acts that the boys committed choosing savagery over civilisation.
(*Lord of the Flies*)



- ◆ Try to integrate the quote into your sentence and analyse its significance. If the quote is a short phrase, work it into your sentence. If the quote is longer, use dashes or a colon. (See “Quotes: 10 tips”, pp. 131-132.)
 - » The boys hunt the pig and seek to “spill his blood”.
 - » The boys increasingly become involved in war-like games to camouflage their desire to kill. Their imperative-style chants — “Kill the pig! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!” — help them channel their brutal desires into a game.
- ◆ Select quotes that provide an insight into the character’s mindset.
 - » One of the most brutal events in *Lord of the Flies* is Piggy’s death. When Roger releases the fatal rock, he deliberately “leaned all his weight on the lever”.
- ◆ Analyse the purpose and implications of the quote. What type of language is it? Why is it significant?
 - » Roger, who releases the “great rock”, appears to be gripped by an irrational streak. Enveloped in a “storm of sound” — “an incantation of hatred” — Roger acts with a “sense of delirious abandonment”. This deliberate act of violence by one of the tribe’s sadists reflects Golding’s view that many of the boys are losing their grip on reality.
 - » Contrastingly, Piggy dies holding the “talisman”, the “shining beauty of the shell”, which breaks into pieces. The loss of the conch symbolises the disintegration of a rules-based, cohesive community. Before his death, Piggy asks three questions prefaced with an appeal — “which is better ...?": “Which is better, law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up?” The questions exemplify Golding’s disturbing point that most of the boys are unable to co-operate for their mutual benefit.

Establish a connection between the quote, the example and the author’s views: Piggy’s death is described in dehumanising terms. Falling forty feet, his body disintegrates and the “stuff came out and turned red”. His arms and legs twitched, “like a pig’s after it has been killed”. This barbaric death emphasises the loss of humanity among the boys on the island.

- ◆ to emphasise
- ◆ to accentuate
- ◆ to highlight
- ◆ to reveal
- ◆ to capture
- ◆ to reflect
- ◆ to exemplify
- ◆ to illustrate