How To Effectively (and Correctly) Use Quotes In Your Writing

"Quotations" are funny little things. People like to use them to start essays, in the body of essays, and at the end of essays. They are an integral part to research papers and add merit and credibility to general essays. However, there is a specific way to use them. If quotations are used incorrectly, they can cause much more harm than they are worth. Here are some tips so that you will know always how to use a quotation in an essay.

Quotations should add impact to your essay, but they should also flow smoothly through your writing. In other words, a reader should not have to stop and notice the quote. Below is an example of a poorly inserted quote:

Brutus addressed the plebeians. “Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more” (3.2.21-22).

In this case, the quote is simply tossed in without any introduction or explanation. Here is the same example with the quote used correctly:

Brutus addressed the plebeians, explaining that he had to murder Caesar “Not that [he] loved Caesar less, but that [he] loved Rome more” (3.2.21-22). Brutus wants to show the public that his love for his country far surpassed his love for his friend.

In this example, the quote flows smoothly with the writing and is explained afterwards. The change in pronoun is optional, but will help with the flow of the writing.

Ways to set up the quote

Sometimes, you describe the quotation in your own words before using it. In this case, you should use a colon (:) to indicate the beginning of the quotation. Then begin the quotation with a quotation mark ("). After you have completed the quotation, close it with a quotation mark ("). Here is an example:

Sir Winston Churchill made a witty remark on the attitude of a pessimist: "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

Sometimes the sentence in which the quotation is embedded does not describe the quotation, but merely introduces it. In this case, do away with the colon. Simply use the quotation marks. Here is an example:

Sir Winston Churchill once said "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

If the quotation is three lines or longer, set it off like a block quotation. Some writers prefer
to set off two-line verse quotations also, for emphasis. Quote a poem line by line as it appears on the original page, and do not use quotation marks. Indent one inch from the left margin. See the example below:

Antony brilliantly counters Brutus’ assertions that Caesar is ambitious with the following evidence:

He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill;
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept;
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.  (3.2.90-94)

Quotes can be manipulated to fit your purposes. You do not need to use the entire quote.

Brutus flatters the plebeians, allowing them to believe that they “may be the better judge” (3.2.17).

**You must cite your quote properly!** Improper citation is not only plagiarism, but it also brings the writing to a screeching halt. Start and end the quote using quotation marks (“”). Regardless of where the quote comes in the sentence, **punctuation** (periods, questions marks, etc.) **always comes at the end of the sentence.** Nothing changes here. Omit the punctuation at the end of the quote and place it at the end of the sentence. Consider the following example:

Brutus flatters the plebeians, allowing them to believe that they “may be the better judge” (3.2.17).

In the original text, the period came at the end of the word “judge.” However, in order to cite the quote properly, the punctuation has been removed and placed at the end of the sentence.

Used properly quotations almost always enhance your writing. Refer back to this sheet any time to have questions regarding quotation use.