Making decisions about when and how to use direct quotations can challenge any writer. When used properly, quotations add strength to an argument. They show that a writer has sought out information from “experts” and has been careful to record the source’s exact words. An argument sprinkled judiciously with quotations tends to be more interesting and more persuasive. Overuse of quotes, however, can clog writing and diminish the writer’s own voice. So handle these words with care; incorporating quotations into an argument requires careful thought and technique.

When to use direct quotes

• When the speaker is widely recognized as an authority in a field related to your issue. For example, you might choose to quote Bobby Knight (Texas Tech basketball coach) in an argument about college basketball.

• When the speaker uses particularly vivid or specific language. Such sentences tend to lose their impact when paraphrased. Notice the difference between the following examples:

  In the interview, interior designer Ty Ross expressed his belief that his grandfather is proud of him.
  Ross, a 31-year-old interior designer, describes his grandfather’s reaction: “I can tell he’s proud of me . . . I can see it all in his eyes.”

The second example, taken from Newsweek, appeals to readers’ emotions in a way the first one does not. It captures Ross’s language, suggests the close relationship between the interior designer and his grandfather, and has a more profound impact on readers.

Framing quotes: attribution and analysis

Framing is a technique for incorporating quotes into your own writing and making them serve your purposes. For these reasons, it is almost always a good idea to frame your quotes and provide analysis.

• Framing and attribution. The most straightforward method of framing quotes is to use speaker tags (also called attributive tags or lead-in verbs) at the beginning, middle, or end of a quote. For a list of common lead-in verbs, see the “Verbs of Attribution” handout. As the name implies, these tags tell your reader about the speaker or writer of the quote.

  According to the Arapahoe County sheriff, “People were dropping like flies.”
  “I hate quotations,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1849, “Tell me what you know.”

Block quotes get handled differently. Do not put quotation marks around block quotes. In MLA style, these passages (quotations of more than 3 lines) should be double-spaced and indented one
inch on the left (ten spaces). The sentence that precedes a block quote should introduce the speaker and context. Sentences preceding block quotes are punctuated with a colon or period.

**Framing and analysis.** Framing can do much more than provide simple attribution. The way you frame quotes can also indicate your stance on the issue at hand, and how you see the quote contributing to the overall argument of your paper.

This excerpt from Lewis H. Lapham’s article “Burnt Offerings” demonstrates several elements of smooth quote handling:

Michel Chevalier, an astute and observant traveler in late-nineteenth-century America, noticed that American society had the morality of an army on the march, an opinion seconded by Albert J. Nock in his *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man*. Describing his boyhood in the 1870s, Nock remembered that it was the freebooters carrying off the heaviest sack of spoil who “were held up in the schools, the press, and even in the pulpit, as prototypical of all that was making America great, and hence as par excellence the proper examples for well-ordered youth to follow.”

Lapham uses the transitional phrase “an opinion seconded ...” to move from Chevalier’s thoughts to Nock’s specific words. Lapham uses descriptive terms “astute” and “observant” to signal his agreement with Chevalier’s judgment. Lapham also uses direct quotes judiciously, and recreates the context in which the quote appeared: “Describing his boyhood...”

**Rhetorical uses of framing quotes**

Note how the following examples all use the same quote (“Politically, I call it rape whenever a woman has sex and feels violated.” — Catharine MacKinnon) but frame it in ways that completely alter its rhetorical function.

Against the prevailing myth that rape only occurs when a woman is assaulted by a stranger, MacKinnon asserts, “Politically, I call it rape whenever a woman has sex and feels violated.”

When she asserts, “Politically, I call it rape whenever a woman has sex and feels violated,” Catharine MacKinnon argues in support of a woman’s right to define her own experience.

Representing the extreme of the feminist movement, Catharine MacKinnon unapologetically declares, “Politically, I call it rape whenever a woman has sex and feels violated.”

Flame-throwing feminazis like Catharine MacKinnon take every opportunity to cast women in the role of hapless and long-suffering victims. Her take on rape perfectly illustrates this strategy. “Politically,” she says, “I call it rape whenever a woman has sex and feels violated.”

**Reminder:** All direct quotations must be properly cited in standard academic writing. The MLA (Modern Language Association) and APA (American Psychological Association) provide two of the most commonly used guidelines for source citation, although there are many other conventions for citing quotes. Please consult with your instructor, the relevant handbooks, UWC consultants, or relevant UWC handouts if you have questions about how to cite your quotes.