

Miscellaneous Tips for the Research Paper

1. **When choosing direct quotations, choose the quotes that *best* help you prove your assertion(s) and therefore your thesis.** Don't quote randomly or haphazardly, and don't quote to just set up context. Remember: quotations should be used for *evidence* for an assertion, and that assertion must be related to your thesis.
2. **Internal documentation does not always go at the end of a sentence.** If you quote from two different places in a single sentence, or if you give evidence in a sentence that ends with your own commentary, you will need to cite the source(s) where they occur. The reader should never be confused about which ideas are yours and which come from one of your sources. Let's look at two examples.

Consider this sentence from one of my grad school papers wherein I am contrasting two widely disparate critics:

Twain likely would have appreciated the comically extreme disparity between the viewpoints of John H. Wallace, who called the book "the most grotesque example of racist trash ever written" (16), and Justin Kaplan, who asserts that it is "a savage indictment of a society that accepted slavery as a way of life" (356).

The two quotations cited in this sentence are from two different works by two different authors, so each must have its own citation. Since I mentioned both authors names in the sentence, there was no need to give anything but the page numbers.

Here is another example, in which I have to cite the source in the middle of the sentence because what comes after the quote is my own idea.

It was certainly within the realm of possibility that the widow, who could "talk about Providence in a way to make a body's mouth water" (40), convinced Miss Watson to free Jim in order to squash her guilt for considering selling him and removing him from his family.

If the citation was at the end of the sentence, it would look like that idea came from *Huckleberry Finn* rather than being my speculation.

3. **Remember that you can cite a critic simply to disagree with him or her.** If you are having trouble finding enough critics who are making arguments that you could use to support yours, consider using a critic just to disprove him or her:

Critics like Leo Marx, who criticizes Twain for having a "failure of nerve" (305), have made the mistake of criticizing the book for what it is not, of giving Huck's moral transformation more weight than it has, and of confusing Huck's purpose with Twain's.

4. **Remember that the heart of your argument is the commentary.** If all you have is one sentence at the end of each body paragraph, you don't have nearly enough. Roughly half of each body paragraph should be commentary, and said commentary is not necessarily only at the end of paragraphs. When you get really good, you will be able to seamlessly blend your assertions, evidence, and commentary such that you won't even have to think about what you need next.
5. **There should only be one voice in your paper: YOURS.** Despite the fact that you will be quoting the authors of the sources or people quoted in the sources, your paper should always be in your own voice (the

serious, scholarly you). I like to think of it as though you are a tour guide and you are giving the reader a tour of arguments already made on the issue. You show the reader what others have said on that topic. But never should the reader feel you have turned over control to another author or commentator. The reader will feel this way if you have very many long quotes, so watch yourself.

6. **Long quotes are different.** If you have the need—and I emphasize the word *need*—to use a quote that is more than 4 full typed lines, you have to do it differently. The sentence leading up to it must introduce it and end in a colon. The quotation itself is indented a whole inch and does not have quotation marks. Finally, for no apparent reason, the period goes before the citation. Like so:

Nelly Dean treats Heathcliff poorly and dehumanizes him throughout her narration:

They entirely refused to have it in bed with them, or even in their room, and I had no more sense, so, I put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it would be gone on the morrow. By chance, or else attracted by hearing his voice, it crept to Mr. Earnshaw's door, and there he found it on quitting his chamber. Inquiries were made as to how it got there; I was obliged to confess, and in recompense for my cowardice and inhumanity was sent out of the house. (Brontë 78)

7. **When revising your paper, read it aloud.** You will be much more likely to pick up on the potholes, speed bumps, and all of the other things that may disrupt the clarity and fluidity of your paper.
8. **When proofreading your paper, read it backwards, from the last sentence to the first.** In this way, you are far more likely to see what is *actually* there rather than what you *think* is there.
9. **The more quickly I can read through your paper, the better your grade.** I'm not talking about length but about clarity, fluidity, and correctness. The more times I have to sigh or to roll my eyes or to groan in agony or to ask, "Huh?" the lower your grade. So for the love of all that's good and decent in the world, proofread your paper.