

Floating Quotations and Quotation Punctuation: Easy-to-fix errors in writing

by Lauren Streeter

Floating Quotations

What is a floating quotation?

Floating quotations are quotations which seem to have been thrown into a paragraph randomly, without any explanation. Here is an example of a floating quotation:

Petrarch notices how quickly time goes by; therefore it makes him question why he waited so long to change his ways to reach eternity in heaven. “Long since I should have opened mine eyes...and true it is that I have delayed too long.”

Why are floating quotations a problem?

Floating quotations in writing are sometimes confusing to the reader (that’s me) because no explanation of the quote or why the quote was used is given by the writer (that’s you). In your essays, always try to use quotations as evidence to support your thesis statement and your assertions.

When adding a quotation into your essay, also try to integrate the quotation into your text, so that it does not disrupt your own argument and analysis. Your quote should also introduce the source of the quotation, whether the source is primary or secondary.

pop-up [Remember that it is your responsibility to quote accurately from the original and to cite the source!]

What are some general guidelines for correcting floating quotations?

Choose quotations that help to strengthen your argument. They should support your thesis statement, hypothesis, or other assertions you have made.

Introduce your quotes by identifying the speaker or source/context of the quote.

Momaday states: “A word has power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning; its gives origin to all things. By means of words can a man deal with the world on equal terms. And the word is sacred.”

Or

Odysseus realizes that by saying his name, he would be in more trouble than he would like to. Instead, he says, “My name is Nobody. That is what I am by my mother and father and by all my friends.”

2) Include the analysis that the selected quotation demonstrates or supports.

The argument seems to end when the main character, Tom, asks, "Do you feel better?"

3) You should indicate what you think the quotation means. Use a quotation and then say what it means. Or you could explain the point you are analyzing and then provide evidence in the form of a quotation. Don't assume that your quotations will speak for themselves without explanation.

The Final Steps

The final step you can take is to look back over your paper (especially the quotes) using the following checklist:**pop-up**

[1. Are quotations clearly and smoothly integrated into the paragraph? Do you introduce the quotations and explain their significance in relation to your topic sentence and thesis? Are there any "floating quotations" that are not integrated into your paragraph?

2. Are quotations too long? Are they too frequent? Have you let them obscure your own thinking?

3. Do quotations appropriately support the topic sentence and major points, or do they emanate from the Twilight Zone, seeming unrelated to anything in your paragraph?

4. Are all quotations (and paraphrases) clearly documented?]

Quotation Punctuation

I've got some quotes I'd like to use in my paper/lab. How should I put them in?

First of all, it's great that you have some quotes to use in your paper, laboratory write-up, or other writing that you're working on! Putting quotations into a paragraph is an easy way for you to show that you have supporting evidence to further back up your argument/thesis statement. **Be aware, however, that many professors forbid direct quotes in science and engineering labs or reports.**

First things first

When using a quotation in a paragraph, it is always important to use quotation punctuation: “ and ” Quotation marks should only be used around the exact words that were written by the author or that were spoken by the original speaker and don't forget to always use closing quotation marks.

Generally, if the quotation appears in the middle of a sentence, there will not be a period included inside the quotation. Here's an example:

Noted psychologists argue that “traditional methods of measuring test anxiety are inadequate” except when used when studying large groups of people (Jones 19).

If the quote is at the sentence end, where should the punctuation be placed?

If a citation ends the sentence, the quotation may look like the first example below. If there is no citation, the quotation may look like the second example.

1) Macbeth defines eternity simply as “To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow” (85).

2) Macbeth defines eternity simply as “To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow.”

The only difference between those two examples is that the first has a page citation followed by a period. The second example has no citation and therefore should contain the period within the quotation punctuation.

Where do question marks (?) and exclamation points (!) fit into quotations?

If the quotation used contains an exclamation point or question mark, those punctuation marks are always included inside the quotation punctuation. If your quote involves a question posed by a character or researcher, it may look something like this:

Hamlet said to Ophelia “Lady, shall I lie in your lap?” as he prepared to insult her.

In this case, the question mark is placed within the quotations, and the overall sentence is finished with a period. The same type of format will be used if the quote ends in an exclamation point.

What about citing my quotes?

For quote citation styles, please refer to the Citation tutorial found on the Writing Center homepage.