

Using sources effectively: Avoid “floating quotes”

“Floating quotes” are also called “plugged in,” “dropped,” “dropped in,” “dangling,” “island,” or “orphan quotes.” All these names attempt to describe the same problem: **a quotation that uses an entire original sentence from a source as an entire sentence in the current piece of writing.**

A floating quote interrupts the reading for the reader, introducing a new “speaker” who is mysteriously not mentioned. Even if a full citation is included, indicating the source, a floating quote is ineffective and confusing.

Example floating quotes:

... While optimists push the movement of websites and e-mail addresses flash on all advertising, promising simplicity for our hectic lives and education for our children, Devlin does not think it is a positive thing. **“In short, the much balleyhooed promise of computers for education has yet to be realized” (16).** He believes that finding information and retrieving it from the Internet is long and tedious.

The experiment O’Neill conducted was an ungraded eighty-six-question “general knowledge” test issued to students on the first day of classes, which they did not do well on. **“Most students answered incorrectly far more often than they answered correctly” (232).** Incorrect answers included fallacies such as “Darwin invented gravity” and “Leningrad is in Jamaica.”



How to avoid or correct a floating quote

There are two basic ways to avoid the floating quote (other than **paraphrasing instead, of course!**):

- integrate the quoted sentence with a narrative citation (attribution)—pretty good choice!
- OR
- use a **partial quote**—usually a **much better idea!**

Integrate with a narrative citation

A narrative citation is when the author’s name is written as part of the sentence, with the remaining documentation in parentheses (year of publication for APA, page number for MLA).

examples on next page—

Examples:

According to O'Neill, "Most students answered incorrectly far more often than they answered correctly" (232).

"Most students," O'Neill points out, "answered incorrectly far more often than they answered correctly" (232).

For specific help with narrative citations, see the SVCWC Writing Guide "APA Documentation: Authors' names" or "MLA Documentation: Authors' names."

Integrate by using a partial quote

The following information from Coates Library at Trinity University demonstrates how to use a partial quote to avoid floating quotes.

Partial Direct Quotation

Definition: The use of a direct quotation in which the beginning or end of the quote has been revised so that the sentence may be introduced or completed by your own words. The text that has been directly quoted must be enclosed in quotation marks and the source must be cited.

Example:

Original Text:

"If writing is a tool, then it is part of the Cartesian dualistic reality in which we all continue to live. A tool is a thing out there in the world, a palpable object that one can store in the garage and retrieve as necessary. A tool can be put aside; language cannot" (Welch 45).

Partial Direct Quotation of the Text:

As Welch argues, the "tool" analogy for thinking about writing is a faulty premise, since "a tool is a thing out there in the world, a palpable object that one can store in the garage and retrieve as necessary. A tool can be put aside; language cannot" (45).

- **Benefit of using this strategy:** This strategy allows you to flow in and out of the quote by using your own words and your own thinking.
- **Challenge of using this strategy:** Be certain that the partial direct quotation, along with your own writing, is not so long that the sentence becomes challenging for the reader to comprehend or follow. [And be sure the partial quotation **works grammatically within the sentence.**]