

Anatomy of APA Style: Using Quotations



Bare Bones of the Quotation

Authority Phrase + “Quotation” + (Parenthetical Reference).



Sample Quotation

With *Full* Parenthetical Reference

According to animal control officers, “Some people mistakenly think [a Florida panther] will make a good pet and do not know what to do when their ‘pet’ starts to knock down family members and bite them” (Tekiela, 2010, p. 239).

With *Abbreviated* Parenthetical Reference

According to Main (2019), “The number one cause of death for [Florida] panthers is collisions with vehicles. ... Their second-leading cause of death: deadly fights over territory” (para. 16).



Notes to Flesh Out the Quotation Correctly

Authority Phrase

In an academic paper, quotation marks signal that you are handing over responsibility to someone else. Is that someone worthy of your readers’ attention? To answer yes, you must legitimize the quoted information by opening it with words of your own. This transition to the quotation should do one of two things: either *identify* the source of the quotation or *connect* the quotation to a point that you (the expert) are making. Call this transition to the quotation the *authority phrase*.

Identifying the Source

If the quotation is one or more full sentences, then the authority phrase can note the source of the information. When you note a source in the body of your essay, APA emphasizes the author and year of publication. If you are quoting from a 2019 article by Douglas Main, a reporter for *National Geographic*, the transition will resemble one of these examples:

According to Main (2019),

As Main (2019) explained,

Main (2019) made this point:

Main (2019) noted that

Notice that the verbs are past tense—*explained*, *made*, and *noted*. APA requires that you use past tense when you discuss your sources.



If you have identified the year of publication earlier in the paragraph, do **not** repeat it in the authority phrase. Instead, use *According to Main*, *As Main explained*, etc. The year of publication should appear *one time only* in the paragraph.

If your source is a work of fiction (a poem, short story, play, novel, or film), the authority phrase can identify the person speaking. (The person speaking is **never** the author). Use *speaker* or *speakers* for a poem and either a character's name or *narrator* for a short story, play, novel, or film.

According to the speakers,

As the narrator described,

Vic made this point:

Miss Gavin complained that

Passing the Baton

Sometimes the authority phrase starts a thought that the quotation finishes. You, the expert in the paper, pass the baton, like this:

In a state where politicians are determined to develop wild areas, the Florida panther's recovery has been slow, especially since "a lack of habitat ... indirectly leads to their second-leading cause of death: deadly fights over territory"

Notice that the authority phrase includes present tenses—*are determined* and *has been*. The authority phrase is not discussing the source; it is commenting on *current* environmental conditions, which requires present tenses.

Quotation

A quotation is another writer's exact words. You might need these words to support a point you are making, or you might include them to show a position that you plan to refute. When you choose a quotation from a source, keep these things in mind:

- The quotation should *not* be common knowledge. Choose information that your readers do not readily know.
- The quotation should have a wow factor. It should provide such interesting information—numbers, insights, warnings, advice, consequences, etc.—that your readers think, “Wow!”
- The quotation should have such effective phrasing that you could not say it better yourself.
- To indicate that these words are not your own, you enclose them in *double* quotation marks—“Like this.”
- So that you, the writer, do not look lazy, the quotation should be fewer than 40 words.

After you pick a good quotation, you might need to alter it. Perhaps you want to omit a phrase or even a full sentence or two. Maybe you want to clarify a pronoun by substituting a real noun. In either case, special punctuation—ellipses and brackets—will help you do the job.

Using an Ellipsis to *Remove One or More Words*

If you delete one or more words from the *middle* of a quotation, show this omission with an ellipsis, three periods in a row. Read this original quotation from an *Orlando Sentinel* article on the plight of the endangered Florida panther:

“That’s not much space, considering a male can lay claim to nearly 100 square miles—an area the size of the city of Orlando—and a female covers about half as much”

To make a more succinct point, you might want to omit some of the quotation. An ellipsis will remove the middle portion:

“A male can lay claim to nearly 100 square miles ... and a female covers about half as much”



In APA, if you remove words at the *front* and/or the *end* of the quotation, you do *not* need ellipses.

After you remove content with one or more ellipses, what remains must be a grammatically correct sentence that makes a complete thought.

Using Brackets to **Add One or More Words**

To indicate that you have modified the quotation with words of your own, put the change in brackets:

“A male [Florida panther] can lay claim to nearly 100 square miles ... and a female covers about half as much”

Notice that the uppercase *A* that begins this quotation was a lowercase *a* in the original above. In APA, you do not need brackets to change 1) the first letter of the first word of a quotation or 2) punctuation at the end of a sentence.

When you add words with brackets, what remains must be a smooth, grammatically correct sentence.

Parenthetical Reference

Next, you must locate the quotation in its source. You show the location with a parenthetical reference that follows the quotation. The pattern looks like this:

Authority Phrase + “Quotation” + (Parenthetical Reference).



The *one* period that ends the sentence *follows* the parenthetical reference.

Documenting sources *with* page numbers

Many sources—such as printed books and PDF files from databases—include page numbers that you can reference.

If you have *not* mentioned the author and year of publication before the quotation, you will need a *full* reference, which will include the author’s last name, year of publication, the abbreviation **p.** or **pp.** for page number(s), and then the page number(s) themselves.

The reference will look like this:

(Author’s Last Name, Year of Publication, p. Page Number)

Here is an example:

According to animal control officers, “Some people mistakenly think [a Florida panther] will make a good pet and do not know what to do when their ‘pet’ starts to knock down family members and bite them” (Tekiela, 2010, p. 239).

If you *have* mentioned the author and year of publication before the quotation—either earlier in the paragraph or in the authority phrase—you will need only the page number in your reference:

Tekiela (2019) had this to say: “Some people mistakenly think [a Florida panther] will make a good pet and do not know what to do when their ‘pet’ starts to knock down family members and bite them” (p. 239).

Documenting sources *without* page numbers

When a source does not have page numbers, use paragraph numbers (prose) or line numbers (poems).

The parenthetical reference will resemble one of these:

(Author’s Last Name, Year of Publication, para. Paragraph Number)

(Author’s Last Name, Year of Publication, line Line Number)

If you have *not* mentioned the author and year of publication before the quotation, you will need a *full* reference, which will include the author’s last name, year of publication, the abbreviation **para.** for paragraph(s), and then the paragraph number(s) themselves.

Limited habitat further hinders recovery, for “a male [Florida panther] can lay claim to nearly 100 square miles ... and a female covers about half as much” (Spears, 2011, para. 8).

For poetry, you use the word **line** or **lines** instead of the abbreviation **para.**

As the speaker noted, “you take her in your arms, / and she turns into a ... panther / and bites you to death” (Field, 2007, lines 8 – 10).

If you *do* mention the author and year of publication before the quotation, you will need an abbreviated reference:

According to Spears (2011), “a male [Florida panther] can lay claim to nearly 100 square miles ... and a female covers about half as much” (para. 8).