

Writing For Media

Week 5 Quotations

Introduction

- Quotations can be more than strings of words with punctuations surrounding them.
- They can generate emotions; provide vivid descriptions, anecdotes and explanatory or exclusive material.
- Quotations can make a dull story come to life, and they can make a good story even better.
- They can make a reader want to continue with a story.
- The challenge is learning how and when to use them.

Using quotations

Types of quotations

Statements can be handled as:

- Complete direct quotations
- Partial quotations
- Indirect or paraphrased quotations

(i) Complete Direct Quotations

- The reporter could consider the sentences to be so well stated, vivid and important that they are worthy of a **complete direct quotation**, which provides readers with the precise language of the source.
- This is where the source's exact words are set off by quotation marks.

(ii) Partial quotations

- The reporter could also conclude that only portions of the sentences that were spoken to be worthy of direct quotation. In that case, **partial quotations** would be used.
- Partial quotations alter the language—but not the meaning—of much of the statement while retaining specific parts of the original sentences.
- This is where specific portions of a lengthier complete direct quotation are reported and set off by quotation marks.

(iii) Indirect/Paraphrased quotations

- The reporter could conclude that the sentences spoken or comments would be handled best as an **indirect quotation**.
- This means a paraphrase of a source's statement retains its meaning.
- In this case, attribution must be provided.

When and How To Quote

- Whether statements should be handled as direct quotations, as partial quotations or as indirect quotations depends on a number of factors.
- Some reporters use quotations sparingly because they do not want to turn their stories completely to their sources.
- Others use quotations as often as possible because only then can the source speak directly to the audience.
- Quotation marks around a sentence mean that the words are exactly—or nearly exactly—what the person said.
- Generally most editors allow reporters to clean up grammar or to take out profanities in direct quotations.

- It is important to make sure that direct quotations are accurate. When in doubt, paraphrase what the source said.
- When paraphrasing what someone said, make sure to use attribution. Tell the readers *who* is behind the statement.
- Never make up quotations or paraphrases.

Guidelines for Direct Quotations

- Use direct quotations for specific, vivid statements.
- Use direct quotations for descriptive statements.
- Use direct quotations for inner feelings.
- Use direct quotations to capture personality.
- Use direct quotations to supplement statements of fact.
- Use direct quotations for dialogue.
- Use direct quotations to reduce attributions.

Pitfalls to Avoid in Quoting

Reporters can fall into traps when quoting sources. Here are some guidelines to consider:

- *Beware of inaccuracies in quotations:* Reporters should verify quotations that sound suspect. If follow ups reveal that the quotation is inaccurate, the reporter could call the source back to ask if there is an explanation for the discrepancy, or the quotation could be left out.
- *Beware of rambling quotations:* Some sources love to hear themselves talk. If their long, drawn-out *rambling quotations* bore the reporter, chances are they will also bore the audience. Paraphrase instead or use partial quotations.

- *Beware of incomprehensible quotations:* Reporters must paraphrase quotations into understandable language and not use technical jargons especially when reporters are interviewing doctors, lawyers and research scientists.
- *Do not reconstruct quotations:* Do not add things to a quotation to make it better or to cover up your failure to get the entire quotation. Do not take a partial quotation (an incomplete sentence) and add your own words to make it a complete sentence.
- *Observe taste in quotations:* Do not use obscenities, profanities and vulgarities in stories unless they are part of direct quotations and there is compelling reason for them. Editors can decide whether to leave it in or delete it.

- *Be certain when using dialect.* The use of dialect can also be a matter of taste; dialects often appear to ridicule the subject in a condescending way.