

FROM THE LEGAL WRITING CLINIC
WRITING TIP OF THE WEEK

USING QUOTATIONS



Don't make the mistake of overusing quotations because you are unsure about how to use them. Remember that the purpose of quotations is to call attention to **specific words**. You lose the reader's attention when your quotations are too long or too frequent, so quote only when the exact words themselves are important.

Statutes are a good example of when the exact words matter: a case often turns on the interpretation of particular statutory language. But even when quoting a statute, be selective about how much you quote, and quote only the portions of the statute that are relevant to your issue.

Use quotations from case law more selectively. You should usually paraphrase the court's holding and reasoning, saving quotations for key words and phrases or sentences that are so well-written that you could not improve on them. You will rarely need to quote the facts of a case.

- Finding that there was no “special relationship” between the parties, the court held that the University had no duty to protect the plaintiff from the “well-known dangers of using a trampoline.” University of Denver v. Whitlock, 744 P.2d 54, 62 (Colo. 1987).

When you do use quotations, quote the material accurately. Use brackets to show any changes or additions you have made to the original and ellipses to show any deletions necessary to make the quotation fit within your sentence.

- The purpose of the Good Samaritan statute is “to encourage . . . assistance by persons on a voluntary basis to enhance the public safety.” Colo. Rev. Stat. §13-21-116(1) (2013).

Robin Wellford Slocum, Legal Reasoning, Writing, and Persuasive Argument, 257-59 (2d ed. 2006); Anne Enquist & Laurel Currie Oates, Just Writing 115-16 (4th ed. 2013); Laurel Currie Oates & Anne Enquist, The Legal Writing Handbook 555-56 (5th ed. 2010).