

---

# Using Quotations

## When and How to Quote

Direct quotes are necessary to allow sources to speak for themselves. Use quotation marks to surround the **exact words** said or written by a source in a story. Never change the wording in quotations. If you have a question about a quote, either don't use it or ask the speaker to clarify.

“Never alter quotations even to correct minor grammatical errors or word usage. Casual minor tongue slips may be removed by using ellipses but even that should be done with extreme caution.” —AP Stylebook’s Quotations in the News entry

Readers and viewers want to hear from sources in their own words. Quotes are a great way to grab your readers’ or viewers’ attention across platforms. Quotes should convey emotion, opinion, meaning and perspective. Remember to ask open-ended and closed-ended questions, and objective and subjective questions.

Direct quotes should not be used to simply provide factual information or explain a complicated process; instead, paraphrase the quote with attribution.

How many direct quotes you use in your reporting and writing depend on the platform.

- A text story may use only the most compelling direct quotes; avoid using a direct quote in the lead and in multiple consecutive paragraphs.
- Social media storytelling may only use direct quotes.
- Photos may use direct quotes in the second or third sentence to help advance understanding of the image.
- An audio or video piece uses quotes (called sound bites) to punctuate the story.

Watch these [quick YouTube videos](#) that show how to correctly punctuate and attribute direct quotes in journalistic writing.

Also:

Give context. Remember that you can misquote someone by giving a startling remark without its modifying passage or qualifiers.

---

Vary the size of the quotes you use. If a source gives you a strong quote in one sentence, it's OK to just use that sentence. But quotations that reveal more from a source in two to three sentences are needed as well to provide perspective for readers.

Detail attempts to reach a key source, if they don't respond to you. (Ex: Lori Johnston did not respond to phone and text messages.)

Do not direct quote two people at once, unless they said the same thing at the exact same time (which is rare).

Do not rely too heavily on direct quotes from the same person in a story with more than one source quoted. Your readers/viewers may accuse you of allowing one source to dominate your story.

In general, avoid using ellipses and parenthetical clarifications in quoted material. It's better to paraphrase. Also: do not use brackets.

## Punctuating Quotations

Each person's words, no matter how brief, are placed in a separate paragraph, with quotation marks at the beginning and the end of each person's speech.

Either introduce your source before you quote him/her/them or the first time you quote him/her/them. Include relevant identification information, such as their title, major, age, etc.

Key rules:

- The period and the comma go within, not outside, the quotation marks.
- In a quotation with more than one sentence, it is preferred to put the attribution after the first sentence.

### Examples:

- "These are properly vaccinated people," said Dr. Sarah S. Long, a pediatrician and infectious diseases expert at Drexel University in Philadelphia. "We know their risk of breakthrough is very low."
- "We want full transparency of all the demographic information from the NFL — who's applied, who's been paid," Black NFL retiree Ken Jenkins said.

---

## Attributing Quotations

Titles are not capitalized when they appear after a source's name. Depending on the title, they may be capitalized when they appear before a source's name (see the AP style titles entry).

For a well-known figure who is frequently quoted: use the name, then said.

**Example:** "There's going to be some property destroyed in Indianapolis tonight," Georgia football head coach Kirby Smart said.

Then in subsequent quotes, use the last name or pronoun and then said.

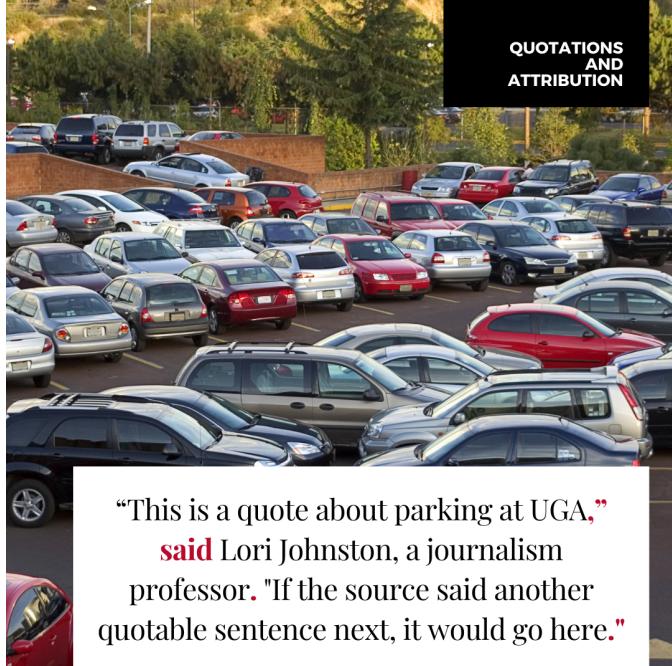
**Example:** "I've never been around a group of players that really wanted it so bad and wouldn't be denied," Smart said.

---

For a person who is not a well-known figure and not frequently quoted: use said, then the name, then relevant ID information.

**Example:** "It makes me so stressed out just thinking about buying gas," said Nancy Oncken, a retired teacher. "It's now always in the back of my mind to be conservative about what I buy."

Then in subsequent quotes, use the last name or pronoun and then said.



"This is a quote about parking at UGA," said Lori Johnston, a journalism professor. "If the source said another quotable sentence next, it would go here."

**Example:** "I'm trying to fill up on my budget," Oncken said. "The prices are ridiculous."

*Quotes from stories in The New York Times, Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Associated Press.*

---

## Dealing with Filler Words

A source who says um, really, so, like and you know frequently can be tough to directly quote. Quotes need to be in the person's voice, but too many "likes" can be distracting and it is better to paraphrase in that case.

Remove words such as "um" and "ah." The AP Stylebook says:

"It's acceptable practice to cut them out. As long as you're not distorting the meaning or context."

"We would retain like, you know, etc. But very often, you can and should paraphrase and not use a direct quote at all. We advise reserving direct quotes for the most stellar or telling quotes."

## Quotes within quotes

For quotes within quotes, use single quotation marks. Capitalize the first letter of the first word inside the single quotation mark.

### **Examples:**

- "The biggest thing that I learned moving away is that love is a complete word," said Ashley M. Jones, the first Black person to be named Alabama's poet laureate. "It's not just, 'I like this thing, it's always good to me.' Love means also understanding what's wrong and committing to pointing that out and trying to change those things that are wrong. And that's how I feel about the South."
- "You have people that reach out to you and go, 'I love that pink color, but my wife's not sure it's going to work,'" said Martyn Lawrence Bullard, a Los Angeles designer who has designed for Cher and some of the Kardashians.

If the story calls for a full paragraph of quoted material followed by a paragraph that continues the quotation, do not put close-quote marks at the end of the first paragraph.

For names of movies, shows, songs, books and other material that require quotation marks (see the AP Stylebook composition titles entry), also use single quotes when used within a quotation.

### **Example:**

---

“I’m a huge ‘Back to the Future’ fan,” said Sadie Sink, who plays Max on “Stranger Things.” “I rewatched it recently, and I see a lot of similarities between Max and Marty. They have the same skateboard, the same backpack.”

### **Partial quotes**

In general, avoid partial quotes. If a speaker’s words are clear and concise, favor the full quote. However, at times, a partial quote is needed, especially if the person says something in a unique way or that is controversial. When you do, any punctuation goes inside quotation marks.

Example: Nancy Pelosi concluded her visit to Taiwan on Wednesday with a pledge that the American commitment to democracy on the self-governing island and elsewhere “remains ironclad.”

### **Sourcing Quotations**

Some stories, especially breaking news, require using quotations from sources such as news releases, statements, news conferences and social media when you do not get the quotes from an individual interview. In those cases, you must cite the source in the attribution.

#### **Examples:**

- “He shot and killed horrifically,” Gov. Greg Abbott said in a news conference.
- “Today is a dark day,” Sen. Ted Cruz said in a statement.
- “We need stricter gun control laws in America,” Olivia Rodrigo said during a concert in Los Angeles.
- “Upon entering the building, agents & other law enforcement officers faced gun fire from the subject, who was barricaded inside,” Marsha Espinosa, an assistant secretary at the Department of Homeland Security, [wrote on Twitter](#).
- “I can’t think of anything to say besides make sure you’re registered to vote,” singer-songwriter Halsey wrote on Instagram. “I just want all school age children to be protected and not grow up in the epicenter of this trauma. It is so futile and revolting that lawmakers protect guns over our youth. It’s despicable.”

### **Dealing with Filler Words**

Your sources, both students and non-students, may use filler words, such as “like,” in their comments during interviews.

---

The AP Stylebook says: “We would retain like, you know, etc. But very often, you can and should paraphrase and not use a direct quote at all. We advise reserving direct quotes for the most stellar or telling quotes.”

If they use “like” multiple times, along with words such as “you know,” “really” and “literally,” that indicates you should use a paraphrased/indirect quote instead of a direct quote, for ease in people reading and viewing the quote.

But we do see the word “like” appear in direct quotes that are necessary, both in stories written in our classes and by professionals. Keeping the “like” also retains the authentic nature of what someone said.

If you chose a direct quote with the word “like” in it, here is guidance about punctuating those quotes with commas. This applies to all uses of text: in full stories, in social media posts, in graphics, and with video, audio and photos.

See this document for tips on [Punctuating “Like” in Quotations](#).

This guide includes information provided in “News Reporting & Writing,” “Working with Words” and the AP Stylebook. Quotes from stories in The New York Times, Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Associated Press. Guide created by professors Lori Johnston and Ramsey Nix.