

## How to Avoid Quotation Overcrowding

The following discussion connects to p. 310 of *Acting on Words*.

Do not overcrowd your paper with quotations. Direct quotations are your most authentic, vital representation of another writer's words and thoughts, whether those quotations are incorporated into your own sentences—such as “Yun argues that the novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* presents ‘justice as only another random occurrence, a grim lottery’ (42)”—or are much longer citations in block quotations. But be careful that you do not overcrowd your paper with a relentless string of direct quotations. By overcrowding, you avoid actually writing a paper and instead weakly cut and paste one, from various voices, none of which is your own.

“Quotation clustering” is a common student response and often the result of too much urgent reading as the deadline looms. Poor time management results in insufficient contemplation and synthesis of your materials into your own writing.

A research paper is first and foremost your work. It should always feature your writing voice strongly, whether you are weighing and evaluating your secondary sources, asserting your points, or arguing against some published views.

### ***Hypothetical example of quotation overcrowding***

Alice Munro's story “Thanks for the Ride” examines “the young male narrator's anxieties about romance while also showing how class differences can create the great distance between people” (Haggarty 41). According to Becky Cameron, “the main character is the young woman, not the male narrator, because she is the character for whom the most may be at stake” (183). Bill Sastri argues that since the male narrator has continued to think about this young, intelligent woman from years ago, “she has probably significantly changed him in some way” (30). Natalie Maharaj points out that the title

suggests the middle-class narrator's sense of superiority has been "successfully undercut by the self-aware, sexually confident, articulate woman, especially by her parting words to him" (134). One critic also contends that the story is an "intersection of *her* sexual confidence fraught with class anxiety and *his* class confidence attempting to mask sexual anxiety (Jaster 42).

### ***Commentary on hypothetical example of quotation overcrowding***

Although this paragraph would indicate that the essayist has ambitiously read several good secondary sources that analyze Alice Munro's story and has located several useful, specific quotations that make points about the story's intertwined sexual and socio-economic aspects, the student's own perspective on the text is completely absent from the paragraph. This weakness relates directly to the absence of any controlling point in the paragraph. Without this controlling point, which needs to be asserted in a topic sentence, the paragraph stalls as only a string of interesting quotations that neither work toward a larger interpretative point nor address each other's perspectives.

Apart from the need for a topic sentence, this essayist's paragraph needs to assert a sense of voice, an overall perspective on these various critics' points. A more assertive student voice here would balance the quotation overcrowding and enable the writer to synthesize the secondary sources *within* the essayist's own observations and claims. As well, these numerous quotations would serve the essayist better if they were spread through the paper to make their points as some kind of a progression within the student's discussion. Here they cluster together in uncertain connection.

When incorporating quotations, secondary sources, facts, and the opinions of others into your paper, you can use two respected techniques of representation besides direct quotation: the *summary* and the *paraphrase*.

The ability to paraphrase and to summarize a primary or secondary source accurately and confidently therefore presents you with two opportunities at once. You continue to incorporate attributed information from your sources into your research essay and you continue to express your voice in choosing your own words to articulate that information.

Paraphrasing and summarizing can demonstrate both your accuracy in fair representation and your resourcefulness with language. For more on summarizing, see Chapter 13 and pp. 298-299; for more on paraphrasing, see pp. 299-302.