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| ***Jim Roth’s Website*****Working with Words from a Source—**[**MLA Style**](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/675/01/)**(click here for** [**APA Style**](http://ol.scc.spokane.edu/jroth/Courses/Writers%27%20Resources/Help%20From%20Me/Working%20with%20Words%20from%20a%20Source--APA.htm)**)**To begin, always keep in mind that other writers’ words are **their property**, so it is critical to learn how to use these borrowed words accurately and legally in your writing. **When should you use another writer’s words?*** When *something is aptly said.* (The writer really “nailed it.”)

OR * *When your ideas need authoritative support.* You sense that your reader might need corroboration.

Otherwise, use your own words and ideas in your essays.NOTE: Typically only 20% of an essay is someone else’s words or ideas. The rest of the words and ideas come from you.**Please note:** Always try to keep quotations as short as possible. We’ll work on ways to shorten long quotations later.**The Basics (MLA style)**Let’s assume we want to work with the following article: The article’s title is “Diplomacy in the 21st Century,” written by Susan Barrett. Let’s also assume that we found this essay in the January 27, 2012 issue of the magazine Modern Diplomacy and that Barrett’s article appeared on pages 40 through 46 of the magazine.The first thing to do is to create a proper MLA works cited entry so we can include this source on the Works Cited page at the end of our essay. According to MLA guidelines, the proper MLA works cited page entry would beBarrett, Susan. “Diplomacy in the 21st Century.” Modern Diplomacy. 27 Jan. 2012: 40-46.**Please note:** Works Cited page entries are double-spaced and, if longer than one line of type, the second and subsequent lines are indented five spaces.----------------------------------------------------Now let’s assume that we want to include the following sentence written by Barrett in our essay. Let’s also assume this sentence appeared on page 43 of the magazine.Here’s the sentence:“In order for diplomacy to be successful, it will have to follow very different rules from the past.”The best way to blend these words with our own is to write a **lead-in or signal phrase**. The reason we need one is if we place the other writer’s words directly into our essay with no introduction or lead-in, our reader may wonder why words in quotation marks have suddenly appeared. Please note that I have written a three or four word lead-in for each example:**Example#1:**I will use the words “According to one expert” as a signal phrase:According to one expert, “in order for diplomacy to be successful, it will have to follow very different rules from the past” (Barrett 43).**Please note** that in Example #1 above, I must include both the author’s last name and page number in the parentheses so that my reader will know which source to look for on my Works Cited page.**Also please note** that MLA format does **NOT** use ‘p’ or ‘pp’ to denote page numbers, just the number by itself. Also, if you need to give the author’s last name along with the page number (example #1), only a space separates the author’s name and the page number.**Example#2** Now my signal phrase will be “Barrett claims that.”Barrett claims that “in order for diplomacy to be successful, it will have to follow very different rules from the past” (43).**Example#3**Next I will add the signal phrase at the end. My words are “writes Susan Barrett, a noted expert in the field.”“In order for diplomacy to be successful, it will have to follow very different rules from the past,” writes Susan Barrett, a noted expert in the field (43).**Please note** in examples 2 and 3, I needed to include only the page number because it was clear to my readers who the owner of those words was.**Example#4**I can also put the signal phrase within the quotation: In the example below, my words are “according to Barrett.”“In order for diplomacy to be successful,” according to Barrett, “it will have to follow very different rules from the past” (43).**Example #5**I can write a half-and-half sentence using a quotation. In the sentence below, the words “Successful diplomacy must” are mine:Successful diplomacy must “follow very different rules from the past” (Barrett 43).**Review:** If it is clear to your reader who the author of the information is, you need include only the new page number in parentheses.**Important**: After giving your reader the author’s full name, subsequent references to the author should be last name only. This may seem rude, but it is the convention we use.**Important**: MLA format does NOT use ‘p’ or ‘pp’ when giving page numbers. Further, only a single space separates the author’s last name and page number.Correct: (Barrett 42) INCORRECT in MLA: (Barrett, p. 42) or (Barrett, 42).**Punctuation Note:** The period and comma are always placed before the closing quotation mark.Correct: “I really thought the soap was food**.”** Bob said, “please find my zebra,” and then he left**.****Using an ellipsis**Knowing how to use an ellipsis is very useful (and very cool). First, an ellipsis, also called an “ellipsis mark,” is a series of three spaced periods: **. . .** To create one, hit the period key, then the spacebar, then the period key again, then the spacebar again, and then the period key one last time. If you use an ellipsis at the end of a sentence, all you need to do is add another space and period to end the sentence **. . . .**Before we see how an ellipsis is used, let’s refer again to the first “**Please note.”****Please note:** Always try to keep quotations as short as possible.That’s right: an ellipsis is most often used to shorten quotations, and I can shorten any quotation as long as the words I leave out do not change the quotation’s meaning.As an example, let’s assume we want to work a bit more with Barrett’s words. On page 43 of the magazine, we read . . .“In order for diplomacy to be successful, it will have to follow very different rules from the past. We can no longer rely on our traditional friends and historical enemies to lend us diplomatic structure. The world today is fluid, not fixed as it was from the end of World War I to the fall of communism, so our diplomatic strategies must be far more responsive than before. Because of this new paradigm, we will need to create diplomatic structures that are elastic so they can be adjusted quickly when needed.”This quotation is way too long to plop into my essay, so here’s how to shorten it. Notice I have spliced together words from the first sentence and the last sentence: “In order for diplomacy to be successful . . . we will need to create diplomatic structures that are elastic so they can be adjusted quickly when needed” (Barrett 43).In this next example, I omit the center of one of Barrett’s sentences to make it leaner:Barrett advises that “the world today is fluid . . . so our diplomatic strategies must be far more responsive than before” (43).I can also end a sentence with an ellipsis:“The world today is fluid, not fixed as it was from the end of World War I to the fall of communism . . . ” (Barrett 43).And, yes, I can begin a sentence with an ellipsis: Barrett claims that “. . . we will need to create diplomatic structures that are elastic so they can be adjusted quickly when needed” (43). |

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**The use of [sic]**“Sic” means “thus.” Use it when a grammatical/spelling mistake exists in the source’s words you want to quote. (That’s right—since the source’s words are someone else’s property, you do not have the right to correct even spelling!)Let’s assume we read the following in a book or periodical:“Was it not obvious then that it ws the nature of the earth to be flat and the sky to be curved?”(Note that the word “was” is missing the letter “a.”) Here is how we would be obligated to quote it:“Was it not obvious then that it ws [sic] the nature of the earth to be flat and the sky to be curved?”Let’s now assume that the incorrect word “than” was used in place of the correct word “then” in this sentence. Here is how our quote would look:“Was it not obvious than [sic] that it was the nature of the earth to be flat and the sky to be curved?” (Allen 47). |

**The use of [Brackets]—not parentheses**Brackets are used to add clarity to a quotation. Here’s an example. Let’s say that President Obama and President Bush are having a discussion. Attending is a reporter who writes, “He then made a very strong case for overhauling the economics system.”The problem is if you use this quotation in your essay, your reader will not know to whom the “he” refers. This is where you can use brackets to add clarity:Attending is a reporter who writes, “He [Obama] then made a very strong case for overhauling the economics system.” Please remember that what is enclosed in brackets within a quotation is yours. Also, remember to use brackets, because if your reader sees parentheses with in a quotation, the assumption is that the parentheses were a part of the original quotation. |

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