

Best Practices for Using Direct Quotes in News Stories

We use direct quotes when

- Someone says something unique.
- Someone says something uniquely.
- Someone important says something important.

Quotes should be useful, informative and move a story forward. Quoting sources that readers and viewers are likely to know lends authority, credibility and interest to your content.

What was said generally is more important than who said it. For this reason, we usually place attribution at the end of the sentence. We place attribution after the first sentence of a multi-sentence quote. A poorly framed statement should be paraphrased, not corrected. [As one of the columnists at Poynter.com said](#): "If a quote contains poor grammar, the bar for using it is surpassed when the substance of the statement contains an important fact, reveals something about the character, and is relevant to the story."

A paraphrase is a quote summarized in the reporter's own words. Therefore, it's no longer an exact replica of what was spoken *and can't be turned back into a direct quote*. If a sentence contains an attribution but no quote marks, it's paraphrased material.

Ellipses should be used sparingly, such as to indicate when an obscenity, profanity or vulgarity has been removed because it's considered offensive or gratuitous by the news outlet.

Information does not need to be attributed to a source if you are a witness or if the information:

- Is a matter of public record.
- Is generally known.
- Is available from several sources.
- Is easily verifiable.
- Makes no assumptions.
- Contains no opinions.
- Is noncontroversial.

Formatting Quotes Correctly: Some Hints

Direct Quotes:

- Should be linked to the paragraph before them. The quote should elaborate on the previous paragraph. For example:

Because of an anonymous \$25,000 donation, students who ride a school bus to and from school will have access to the Internet during their commute starting March 1. "Giving free Wi-Fi to our students will enable them to do research, read the news or even watch educational videos each day," Superintendent Kelli Putman said. "This change will have a positive impact on academic productivity."

Next transition:

Superintendent Putman first proposed this plan in November, but the district did not have the funding to go forward. The city newspaper published an article about the proposal, and the anonymous donation followed.

What comes next? From whom?

Direct quote – elaborates on previous transition:

Superintendent Putman first proposed this plan in November, but the district did not have the funding to go forward. The city newspaper published an article about the proposal, and the anonymous donation followed. "With the tight budget and tough economic times, I thought my Wi-Fi proposal was a pipe dream," she said. "I want to thank the donor for being so generous."

What follows this?

More transitions and quotes (linked):

Not all families can afford or choose to have Internet services in their home, Putman said. "This can be hard on a high school student who is expected to research or communicate with classmates through a blog in the evening," she said. "It puts those students at a disadvantage. Adding Wi-Fi to our buses should level that playing field for our students." Principal Jeanette Rother said that several teachers have been reluctant to give assignments that require Internet access. "This opens up more resources for our students," Rother said. "We may be a little, rural town in West Texas, but we have big city technology."

Direct Quotes:

- Should not repeat the transition/lead before them.
For example:

Principal Jeanette Rother said that several teachers have been reluctant to give assignments that require Internet access. "Several of our teachers have been hesitant about giving homework assignments that would require the Internet," ~~Rother said.~~

- Can be longer than one sentence.

But when they are, consider splitting up the quote into multiple paragraphs, each with its own attribution. Vary the formats for those attributions.

- Should have attribution after the first sentence of the quote.
- Attribution should be: Noun then verb. For example:

Correct - senior Bob Rodriguez said.

Incorrect - said senior Bob Rodriguez. (unless you have an unusually long title)

- Do not place two people's direct quotes next to each other without a transition.

Use transitions to link paragraphs together. These are some general formulas:

Can be fact, indirect quote or a partial quote. For example - FACT TRANSITION:

(lead) President Barack Obama will speak on Friday to seniors about getting involved in community service work.

(Direct Quote) "Seniors will learn a lot about duty and commitment when they hear President Obama," Principal Ike Sumter said. "We are so excited that he agreed to come."

(Fact Transition) Before becoming president, Obama worked as a community organizer in Chicago.

Can be fact, indirect quote or a partial quote. For example - INDIRECT QUOTE TRANSITION:

(Lead) President Barack Obama will speak on Friday to seniors about getting involved in community service work.

(Direct Quote) "Seniors will learn a lot about duty and commitment when they hear President Obama," Principal Ike Sumter said. "We are so excited that he agreed to come."

(IQ Transition) President Obama said he believes community service is more important than college in building character.

Can be fact, indirect quote or a partial quote. For example - PARTIAL QUOTE TRANSITION:

(Lead) President Barack Obama will speak on Friday to seniors about getting involved in community service work.

(Direct Quote) "Seniors will learn a lot about duty and commitment when they hear President Obama," Principal Ike Sumter said. "We are so excited that he agreed to come."

(PQ Transition) President Obama said he believes community service is "extremely valuable lesson" for every teen to have.

Can be parts of the direct quotes to create the transition. And then use the rest of the quote as direct quote.