

YOU CAN  
*quote me*  
ON THAT

Tips on handling direct  
and in-direct quotes

By Bobby Hawthorne  
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## **RULE 1**

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No dumb, obligatory quotes

## **Don't use quotes to present fact.**

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“The band raised \$5000,” band director Tom Ingram said.

## **Quotes should present opinion or clarification.**

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“The kids worked their rears off,” band director Tom Ingram said. “I couldn’t be prouder of them.”

## **Second graf, zinger quote**

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The day remains as sharp in his mind as if it had occurred 24 hours ago, not 59 years.

“The water was on fire, there was so much oil floating on it,” John Evans remembered. “You’d try to help people get out, and their skin would come off in your hands. You can’t get rid of the odor.

“I’ll tell you, you don’t get over something like that.”

But as America celebrates Veterans Day and honors the men and women who fought the nation’s wars, fewer and fewer people can recount what happened at Pearl Harbor or Iwo Jima, at Omaha Beach or the siege at Bastogne.

Members of the World War II generation are in their mid-70s and 80s now.

## **Crisp lead, powerful quote.**

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Pregnancy was 16-year-old Pamela's first sex education lesson.

"My mother didn't tell me anything, or at least I don't remember if she did," said the Houston girl who soon will have a child of her own. "I was nearly 10 when I had my period. Maybe she said something then."

## **RULE 2**

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No quote leads unless  
the quote is amazing.

## **Avoid quote leads unless they're as powerful as this one.**

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“Please,” said the frustrated politician on the other side of the Formica breakfast table in a New Hampshire hotel, “keep your mind open to the possibility that I’m not weird.”

Gary Warren Hart was doing something he doesn’t like to do: he was talking about himself, his childhood, his parents, his religious beliefs, his marriage.

## **This quote lead humanizes what might have been a research paper.**

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“I can remember how I would dread walking into the cafeteria because there was nowhere for me to sit,” says Kevin Sharp, now a junior at the University of North Texas. “I felt like a complete outsider, so I’d usually just wait and eat after school.”

In a world where loners are often perceived as weird or sometimes volatile, it’s no wonder that shy kids can sometimes be labeled an outcast. This feeling of being ostracized often leads children to pull away, increasing their chances of being left out.

**Open with the QUOTE. Follow with the SUBJECT. End with the the VERB.**

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*weak*

Said Bubba Lebowski, coach, "We hope to win the game."

*better*

"We hope to win the game," said coach Bubba Lebowski.

*best*

"We hope to win the game," coach Bubba Lebowski said.

## **but this is okay...**

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“We hope to win the game,” said coach Bubba Lebowski, who is gunning for his 300th win tonight.

“I’m sure we’ll win,” said James Tucker, president of the Football Booster Club, “but if we don’t, ole Bub’s going to be looking for another job.”

## **Don't bury the attribution**

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“We hope to win the game because if we don't, I'm pretty dang sure I'm gonna get fired or promoted to principal. That would be the pits,” said Bubba Lebowski, coach.

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RIGHT

“We hope to win the game because if we don’t, I’m pretty dang sure I’m gonna get fired or promoted to principal,” coach Bubba Lebowski said. “That would be the pits.”

ALSO RIGHT

“We hope to win the game,” said coach Bubba Lebowski, “because if we don’t, I’m pretty dang sure I’m gonna get fired or promoted to principal. That would be the pits.”

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Avoid unnatural breaks in a simple-sentence quote.  
Place the attribution at a natural pause or thought break  
in the sentence.

WRONG

“I” Principal Ethan Edwards said, “quit.”

## **RULE 3**

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- Transition provides the fact.
- The following quote provides opinion or clarification of the fact.
- Do not repeat information from the transition to the quote.

## **Don't repeat yourself...**

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The wrestling team and the school in general are in for a real treat this winter. With the start of the new school year comes a new teacher as well as a new coach, and he is coach Dean Shelton.

For 14 years, Shelton has coached at Madison High where his teams have won nine district, five regional and three state wrestling titles.

Many wrestlers say they look forward to Shelton's arrival.

"I'm really looking forward to his arrival," Miles Ryan, senior, said.

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Others say they can't wait for the season to start.

"I can't wait for the season to start," sophomore Mitch Wilson said. "Coach Shelton is sure to build a winning tradition here, and I'm excited and honored to be a part of it."

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Other players say they expect to learn new techniques. “I hope to learn new techniques,” Mike Wiggins, senior, said. “Coach Shelton knows what it takes to win.”

Of course, wrestlers said they would miss coach David Chapman, who retired.

“I most certainly will miss coach Chapman,” Javier Cruz said. “Absolutely. He was a good man and will be missed.”

Don't stack quotes.

Divide them with a transition sentence.

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“I'm looking forward to playing for the new coach,” senior Miles Ryan said. “Coach Shelton is sure to build a winning tradition here, and I'm excited to be a part of it.”

“I'm going to miss coach Chapman,” junior Mike Wiggins said. “He was like a dad to me. He cared for us as people, not just athletes.”

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“I’m looking forward to playing for the new coach,” senior Miles Ryan said. “Coach Shelton is sure to build a winning tradition here, and I’m excited to be a part of it.”

But all said they’d miss coach Chapman.

“He was like a dad to me,” junior Mike Wiggins said. “He cared for us as people, not just athletes.”

## Building a bridge from one quote to the next

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- Take the first sentence of a direct quote.
- Paraphrase it.
- Use it as your transition sentence.
- Open with the second line of the direct quote.

## The complete direct quote...

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“We know the Tigers are a good team, but we’re not afraid of them. It’s not as if we are planning to lose. Sure, we’re the underdogs, but these kids plan to win, and I expect them to win. Charlie Jones is going to start at quarterback. He’s dinged up but he’s a tough kid. I don’t think I could keep him out of this game if I tried to.”

— Bulldog coach Jeff Moore

## Building a bridge from one quote to the next

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The Bulldogs know the Tigers are a tough team, but they're not afraid of them.

"It's not as if we are planning to lose," coach Jeff Moore said, "Sure, we're the underdogs but these kids plan to win, and I expect them to win."

Charlie Jones will start at quarterback, Moore added.

"He's dinged up but he's a tough kid," he said. " I don't think I could keep him out of this game if I tried to."

# *Attribution*

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Readers needs to know who's speaking and why they're important enough to be quoted in this story

## **RULE 1**

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Attribute all direct quotes to the source of information.

The concert will be the best in the history of the school and everyone will just love, love, love it!

Says who?

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“The concert will be the best in the history of the school and everyone will just love, love, love it,” Joel Richardson said.

Who is Joel Richardson? Why is he an authoritative source?

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“The concert will be the best in the history of the school and everyone will just love, love, love it,” said 102-year-old Joel Richardson, a local music authority who has attended every concert in the school’s history.

## **RULE 2**

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Use both first and last names  
in the initial reference to a source.

“I thought I was a goner,” Smith said.

“I thought I was a goner,” junior Tim Smith said.

## **RULE 3**

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Identify on first reference all students class and teachers by subject taught unless a more formal title is required.

“The new dress code is a joke,” junior Clay Denton said.

“We are asking students to comply with the new dress codes,” AP English teacher Sandra Oliver said.

## **RULE 3**

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Use only the first name of the student on second reference.

“The new dress code is a joke,” junior Paul Kutch said.  
“Where do they get off telling us we can’t wear tanktops and flip-flops to school?”

But administrators are holding firm to the new rule.

“Well then, it’s war,” Kutch added.

## **RULE 4**

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With adults, use the last name. Courtesy titles (Mr., Mrs., Miss) are optional but consistency is required.

“The new dress code reminds students that they’re here to study and work,” assistant principal Dan Peery said. “This isn’t some MTV reality show.”

But students argued that the dress code goes too far.

“Pish-posh,” Peery replied. “Heck, women all over the world wear Burkas. Why not here?”

## **RULE 5**

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Do not capitalize identifying titles or occupational descriptions unless they are the first word in a sentence.

Coach Dan Jones was fired by the school board.  
The school board fired coach Dan Jones.

The starring role was won by senior Patty DuBois.  
Senior Patty DuBois won the starring role.

## **RULE 6**

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Avoid double-titles.

Weak

“Dost thou hear, my honest friend?” said English teacher Dr. Helen Starr . . .

Better

“Dost thou hear, my honest friend?” said English teacher Helen Starr . . .

Then, on second reference, refer to her as “Dr. Starr.”

## **RULE 7**

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- Allow direct quotes to propel the story.
- Keep transitions short and crisp.
- Look for the zinger and the closing quote.
- Build the story in a logical order.

**For more great examples...**

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THE *Radical Write*

By BOBBY HAWTHORNE

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