

How to Use Quotations (MLA System)

Quotations don't explain themselves. They are used to support *your* argument.

This is a body paragraph from a larger essay that explains the increase in divorce rates. It has both expository and persuasive elements, and uses the MLA citation system.

1. If you are introducing an author's major argument, introduce his or her **full name** like this:

2. Focus on **short quotations** that **blend naturally** into a sentence. (Indented block quotations should be used sparingly.) Quotations should reflect the most **significant** and **unique** ideas of the author. The role of quotations is to support *your* argument, so make sure each one is **introduced and/or explained** and avoid making the quotations the dominant part of your writing. In the MLA system, make sure the **author** and **page** number are indicated after the quotation.

One type of explanation for rising divorce rates has focused on changes in laws relating to marriage. For example, Michael Jones (2004) argues that increased rates of divorce do not necessarily indicate that families are now more unstable. It is possible, he claims, that there has always been a degree of marital instability. Jones suggests that changes in the law have been significant, because they have provided unhappily married couples with "access to a legal solution to pre-existent marital problems" (Jones 301). He therefore believes that changes in divorce rates can be best explained in terms of "changes in the legal system" (ibid 424). The problem with this type of explanation, however, is that it does not consider why these laws have changed in the first place. It could be argued that reforms to family law, as well as the increased rate of divorce that has accompanied them, are the product of more fundamental changes in society. Laws are themselves the outcome of complex social and political developments. As legal experts often argue, "law is a mirror of society rather than its leash" (Baraby 43). **On the whole, legal explanations for divorce tend to offer more symptoms than causal explanations.**

3. Any further reference to the author requires the **last name**, not the first name.

4. Subsequent quotations by the same author use the Latin phrase **ibid**, which means another reference to the last thing cited. No page number is given if the quotation is from the same page.

5. Generally speaking, avoid finishing the paragraph with a quotation. It's *your* role to provide the **conclusion**. Moreover, as a concluding sentence, it should bring closure to the paragraph and connect it to the overall thesis; it should not introduce the next paragraph.

Bibliography

Baraby, Lisa. *The Law and Society: Reflections on Complex Interactions*. New York: Vantage Press, 1998.

Jones, Michael. *Divorce Rates and Legal Reforms*. Toronto: Harper & Row, 2004.