

Primer: On Quotations



A short saying often contains much wisdom.

—*Sophocles*, fifth century BC

I quote others only in order to express myself better.

—*Michel de Montaigne*, 1595

The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.

—*William Shakespeare*, 1596

The next best thing to being witty oneself, is to be able to quote another's wit.¹

—*Christian Nestell Bovee*, 1862

When reading a scholarly critic, one profits more from his quotations than from his comments.

—*W. H. Auden*, 1962

That's the point of quotations, you know: one can use another's words to be insulting.

—*Amanda Cross*, 1971

Quotation, *n.* The act of repeating erroneously the words of another.

—*Ambrose Bierce*, 1911

Misquotation is, in fact, the pride and privilege of the learned.

—*Hesketh Pearson*, 1934

¹Of several later paraphrases of this quip, perhaps the most popular is one by W. Somerset Maugham: "The ability to quote is a serviceable substitute for wit".

As many people, so many pronouncements.²

—*Terence*, ~ 160 BC

Quotation confesses inferiority.

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 1876

I always have a quotation for everything – it saves original thinking.

—*Dorothy L. Sayers*, 1932

A witty saying proves nothing.

—*Voltaire*, 1767

²The original Latin sounds even better: “*Quot homines, tot sententiae*”.