



HOW TO USE BLOCK QUOTATIONS EFFECTIVELY

Using block quotes effectively can be tricky for multiple reasons. In this guide, I want to explain three principles for using block quotes and provide three examples with analyses of how well they align with the principles. Instructions for how to format the block quotes can be found in the SBTS Manual of Style and the research paper template (<https://sbtswriting.squarespace.com/generalresources>).

Using Block Quotations

The primary principle for block quotes is **less = more**. A rule of thumb for using block quotes is a *maximum of one per page*. This is a limit, not a goal. Even having one block quote per page, after several pages, your voice will be lost behind them. Your reader will start to wonder if you are making an argument or just doing a copy/paste of your favorite authors. Let your own thoughts shine bright in your writing!

A second principle for block quotes is that **nobody reads them**. This is a slight overstatement, but not by much. People tend to skip over block quotes partially because they want to read what you have to say (not someone else's words) and partially because block quotes often provide supporting or secondary information rather than the primary argument. For this reason, you *must* have the argument summarized in your own words before or after the block quotation. You do not want your point to be missed because someone skipped over your quote. Then again, who wants someone else to make their argument for them anyway?

The final principle is to **consider the value of the quote to your argument**. As a colleague of mine once stated, "Cite thoroughly but quote sparingly. Only use a direct quote if it is worded so clearly and fits so perfectly that you cannot possibly phrase it better yourself." Block quotes are often selected because the phrasing is humorous or the author is well-known or the language sounds authoritative. However, none of these reasons indicate that the quote addresses the argument. Block quotes take up significant portions of page space and word counts. You must make sure they are absolutely necessary and point the reader to your argument. A series of loosely related block quotes will distract your reader rather than support your argument.

Examples of Block Quotations

In this section, I will provide three examples of block quotations and analyze them using the guidelines provided above. *Note that the examples are formatted according to each journal's style guide, not the SBTS Manual of Style.* These examples are provided to show how to use block quotations in an essay, not how to format them according to SBTS style. For SBTS style guidelines on formatting and footnoting block quotes see the SBTS Manual of Style (<https://sbtswriting.squarespace.com/generalresources>).

Example 1

In addition, Billie Jean Collins notes that lexical documents indicate animal class categories:

The Hittite lexical documents further preserve a basic distinction made in the Mesopotamian vocabularies, that between wild and domestic animals. This distinction is so fundamental and so pervasive that it provides the foundation upon which was built the symbolic world of the Hittites. In Hutusi's Ritual, the goddess Kamrusepa is said to purify a man's house and hearth, his land, cattle, sheep, personnel, piglets, and puppies. The two categories of animal that are part of the human realm, livestock and pets, are distinguished from one another in this list because one is perceived as "almost man" and the other as "almost thing."

In this way, the Hittite conception of animals divides livestock species from riding animals in the bestiality laws and further divides between livestock and pets or wild species in the lexical documents.¹

Analysis: The "less = more" principle is hard to show but, if you look at the article, this is one of only three block quotes and the article is twenty pages long. So, it is well under the one block quote per page maximum, but the sources are thoroughly cited as shown by the ninety-five footnotes in the article.

Using the second principle, this quote is summarized in the text surrounding it. The sentence before the quote explains that the documents indicate animal class categories and the paragraph after it summarizes the main point (distinction between livestock and riding animals). So, even if you do not read the quote, you will still understand the argument.

¹ Nicholas J. Campbell, "A Comparative Interpretation of the Old Testament Prohibited Mixtures: Mixed Breeding in Leviticus 19:19," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (2023): 205.

Finally, is the block quote valuable enough to include? This is the most challenging question to answer. The section of the article is about animal categorization in the ancient Near East. So, could the point be made by simply stating that Billie Jean Collins observed this categorization in Hittite documents? It likely could. This quote might be unnecessary. It adds details but the details are not entirely necessary for the thesis of this section or the thesis of the article as a whole (which is about mixtures in the Old Testament). If I had a lot of block quotations in the article or I was close to the word limit, I would likely remove this block quote. Perhaps an editor would see this quote as extraneous and argue it should be in a footnote or removed altogether. If you are debating whether a block quote is necessary or not, it is likely unnecessary.

Example 2

The first section of the boundary stone is about restitution paid for the killing of a slave. The second section, which is the focus of this paper, deals with a marriage between the two families and a piece of land given to the daughter in the marriage (Brinkman, 1968: 248–51; Paulus, 2014a: 152). Within this second section, Arad-Sebetti married his daughter, AN.KA.SIG5.ŠAR.BE, to Burruša’s son and provided her with an estate of 90 *sūtu* of land which was witnessed by Arad-Sebetti’s brothers. *Sūtu* is a measurement of grain from the field. Babylonian documents frequently measure fields by grain produced as well as the measure of the borders (Brinkman et al., 1984). BBSt 9 states,

90 *sūtu* “seed(area),” (in which) 1 *ikū* the big cubit (corresponds to) 3 *sūtu* . . . which in the fifth year of Nabû-mukīn-apli, the king, Arad-Sebetti, the son of Abī-Rattaš, at the request of his brothers, Kaššaja, his eldest son, Larak-zēra-ib[ni], Kaššu-nādin-aḥḥē, Ninurta-apla-iddina, Ekallāja, Uzibja, Zēra-ibni, sons of Abī-Rattaš, a sealed document issued and together with the dowry and the bridal gift to AN.KA.SIG5.ŠAR.BE his daughter, the wife of Šamaš-nādin-šumi, the son of Burruša, the bow maker. (BBSt 9 II.1, 9b–17; Paulus 2014a)

The text continues with an affirmation of this gift by the brother of AN.KA.SIG5.ŠAR.BE (the daughter/bride) who is confirming the permanence of the inheritance upon his death (perhaps this section is part of his will).²

Analysis: The less = more principle requires a description of the entire paper. This article is sixteen pages long (with no footnotes) and contains two block quotes, both of which are sections of the boundary stone inscription. Like the previous example, this is well under the maximum of one block quote per page recommendation.

The preceding paragraph describes the placement of the passage within the tablet and provides an overview of the marriage contract that is cited (with the unfortunately difficult names!). So, following the second principle, it is summarized and perhaps explained more clearly than the block quote. If Babylonian Boundary Stone 9 was not a primary component of the thesis (and in the title of the article), I would prefer to use this basic summary paragraph alone and not include the block quote. However, it is a primary text for the thesis and a difficult passage to read (mostly because of all the weird names and foreign words for measurements!), so it was summarized as clearly and simply as possible in the paragraph and then reproduced in a block quote.

The topic of this article is the Babylonian Boundary Stone 9 (BBSt 9) and inheritance laws. Therefore, citing the stone and specifically the section where the dowry and bridal gift are mentioned is absolutely necessary for the argument. So, the value of this citation, unlike the previous one, is unquestionable. *Note that this is not necessarily the case for citing biblical texts*, especially at SBTS and Boyce. Within the article, Numbers 27 is not cited in a block quote (though it is also in the title of the article). The readers of a theological journal are likely familiar with Zelophehad's daughters so only small parts need to be quoted when they are relevant to a particular part of the argument. However, boundary stone inscriptions are not common knowledge, so citing the relevant portion verbatim is necessary.

Example 3

The naming of the city Azatiwadaya after Azatiwada is a common way of showing ownership throughout the ancient Near East and even in modern western culture. In fact, there are many examples of conquerors renaming cities in the Bible:

² Nicholas J. Campbell, "Daughters and Inheritance: Babylonian Boundary Stone 9 and Numbers 27," *Perichoresis* (forthcoming 2024).

In several passages we read of warriors conquering certain areas and naming them after themselves. Num 32:41–12 tells of Jair and Nobah conquering Transjordanian villages and renaming them, no doubt as a symbol of and a memorial to their dominion over these villages. Josh 19:47 reports the Danites' capture and renaming of Leshem (cf. Judg 18:29). 2 Sam 5:6–9 relates David's conquest of the stronghold of Zion, which he named "the city of David." In each of these cases it is the fact that the place is named after some individual that constitutes the claim of dominion. (Ramsey, 1988: p. 32)

There is a strong cultural tie between the conquering and subsequent renaming of the city of David and Azatiwadaya. However, Yahweh is also making a claim to set his name in the city of Jerusalem.³

Analysis: For the less = more principle, there are two block quotes and two translations of the Azatiwada text that could be counted as block quotes. The article is ten pages long so, even with the block translations, four block quotes over ten pages is well under the one block quote per page maximum.

The quote is somewhat summarized in the preceding paragraph, though not precisely. If a reader skipped over the block quote, they might miss the examples provided in it, but they would still understand the point that renaming a location is an ownership claim.

The final principle of only using block quotes when necessary is where this quote fails. This is in the conclusion of the article. A block quote should be supporting the argument not concluding the paper. In addition, this is adding information that is irrelevant to the argument. The thesis is that Azatiwada (a Phoenician king) claimed a city by "setting his name" on it like Yahweh "set his name" on Jerusalem in 2 Kings 21. Why is a block quote inserted that is referencing random other occurrences of this naming practice? More specifically, why is this block quote adding these examples in the conclusion of the paper when all the points should have been made already? I do not know (and I wrote it!). This might be the reason that the summary before the block quote is not comprehensive. The preceding paragraph summarizes the section of the block quote that is relevant to the conclusion of the paper but ignores the examples in the block quote because they are irrelevant to the paper, and especially the conclusion.

³ Nicholas J. Campbell, "Defacing the Name: YHWH and 'ZTWD,'" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45, no. 1 (2020): 42.