very clever to us has some hidden skills; or also because someone who inspires us may not inspire others. The reasons are many. The point is that we must listen with respect to anyone, without this exempting us from pronouncing our value judgments; or from the knowledge that an author’s opinion is very different from ours, and that he is ideologically very distant from us. But even the sternest opponent can suggest some ideas to us. It may depend on the weather, the season, and the hour of the day. Perhaps, had I read the abbot Vallet a year before, I would not have caught the hint. And who knows how many people more capable than I had read him without finding anything interesting. But I learned from that episode that if I wanted to do research, as a matter of principle I should not exclude any source. This is what I call academic humility. Maybe this is hypocritical because it actually requires pride rather than humility, but do not linger on moral questions: whether pride or humility, practice it.

5.1 The Audience
To whom do you speak when you write your thesis? To your advisor? To all the students or scholars who will have the chance to consult the work in the future? To the general public of nonspecialists? Should you conceive the thesis as a book that will find its way into the hands of thousands of readers, or as a learned report to an academic institution? These are important questions because they concern first and foremost the expository form that you will give to your work, but they also concern the level of internal clarity that you hope to achieve.

Let us immediately eliminate a misunderstanding: it is a common belief that a popular work, where the topic is explained so that anyone can understand it, requires less skill than a specialized scientific report that expresses itself through formulas intelligible only to a few privileged readers. This is not completely true. Certainly the discovery of Einstein’s equation $E = mc^2$ required much more ingenuity than, for example, even the most brilliant physics textbook. But usually works that do not affably explain the terms they use (and that rely instead on winks and nods) reveal authors who are more insecure than those who make every reference and every step explicit. If you read the great scientists or the great critics you will see that, with a few exceptions, they are quite clear and are not ashamed of explaining things well.

Let us then say that a thesis is a work that, for pragmatic reasons, you should address to your advisor, but that is also
meant to be read and consulted by others, even scholars who are not well versed in that particular discipline. So, in a philosophy thesis, it will certainly not be necessary to begin by explaining what philosophy is, and similarly it will not be necessary to explain what a volcano is in a thesis on volcanology. But immediately below this level of obvious knowledge, you should provide the readers with all the information they need to understand your thesis.

First of all, it is necessary to define your terms, unless they are irrefutable canonical terms of the discipline. In a thesis on formal logic, I will not have to define the term “implication,” but in a thesis on the philosopher Clarence Irving Lewis's notion of “strict implication,” I will have to define the difference between this term and “material implication.” In a thesis in linguistics, I will not have to define the notion of “phoneme,” unless my topic is the definition of the term as used by the linguist Roman Jakobson. Yet if I use the word “sign” in this same thesis in linguistics, it might not be a bad idea to define this term, because different authors use it to define different entities. Therefore, as a general rule, define all the technical terms used as key categories in your argument.

Secondly, we must not necessarily presume that the readers have done the work that we have done. If we have written a thesis on Cavour, one of the major figures in the unification of Italy, our readers may already be familiar with him. But if our thesis is on a less widely known patriot like Felice Cavallotti, it may not be a bad idea to remind the readers, if only succinctly, when he lived, when he was born, and how he died. As I write, I have in front of me two theses in the humanities: one on Giovanni Battista Andreini and the other on Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine. I would be willing to wager that, in a group of 100 university professors that includes many experts in the humanities, only a small percentage would be familiar with these two minor authors. Now, the first thesis gets off to a bad start with the following sentence:

The history of studies on Giovann Battista Andreini begins with a list of his works compiled by Leone Allacci, theologian and scholar of Greek origin (Chios 1586–Rome 1669) who contributed to the history of theater. ...
Write instead,

The pianist Paul Wittgenstein was the brother of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Since Paul was maimed of his right hand, the composer Maurice Ravel wrote a concerto for him that required only the left hand.

Or,

The pianist Paul Wittgenstein was the brother of the famous philosopher, author of the Tractatus. The pianist had lost his right hand in the war. For this reason the composer Maurice Ravel wrote a concerto for him that required only the left hand.

Do not write,

The Irish writer had renounced family, country, and church, and stuck to his plans. It can hardly be said of him that he was a politically committed writer, even if some have mentioned Fabian and “socialist” inclinations with respect to him. When World War II erupted, he tended to deliberately ignore the tragedy that shook Europe, and he was preoccupied solely with the writing of his last work.

Rather write,

Joyce had renounced family, country, and church. He stuck to his plans. We cannot say that Joyce was a “politically committed” writer even if some have gone so far as describing a Fabian and “socialist” Joyce. When World War II erupted, Joyce deliberately ignored the tragedy that shook Europe. His sole preoccupation was the writing of Finnegans Wake.

Even if it seems “literary,” please do not write,

When Stockhausen speaks of “clusters,” he does not have in mind Schoenberg’s series, or Webern’s series. If confronted, the German musician would not accept the requirement to avoid repeating any of the twelve notes before the series has ended. The notion of the cluster itself is structurally more unconventional than that of the series. On the other hand Webern followed the strict principles of the author of A Survivor from Warsaw. Now, the author of Mantra goes well beyond. And as for the former, it is necessary to distinguish between the various phases of his oeuvre. Berio agrees: it is not possible to consider this author as a dogmatic serialist.

You will notice that, at some point, you can no longer tell who is who. In addition, defining an author through one of his works is logically incorrect. It is true that lesser critics refer to Alessandro Manzoni simply as “the author of The Betrothed,” perhaps for fear of repeating his name too many times. (This is something manuals on formal writing apparently advise against.) But the author of The Betrothed is not the biographical character Manzoni in his totality. In fact, in a certain context we could say that there is a notable difference between the author of The Betrothed and the author of Adelchi, even if they are one and the same biographically speaking and according to their birth certificate. For this reason, I would rewrite the above passage as follows:

When Stockhausen speaks of a “cluster,” he does not have in mind either the series of Schoenberg or that of Webern. If confronted, Stockhausen would not accept the requirement to avoid repeating any of the twelve notes before the end of the series. The notion of the cluster itself is structurally more unconventional than that of the series. Webern, by contrast, followed the strict principles of Schoenberg, but Stockhausen goes well beyond. And even for Webern, it is necessary to distinguish among the various phases of his oeuvre. Berio also asserts that it is not possible to think of Webern as a dogmatic serialist.

You are not e. e. cummings. Cummings was an American avant-garde poet who is known for having signed his name with lower-case initials. Naturally he used commas and periods with great thriftiness, he broke his lines into small pieces, and in short he did all the things that an avant-garde poet can and should do. But you are not an avant-garde poet. Not even if your thesis is on avant-garde poetry. If you write a thesis on Caravaggio, are you then a painter? And if you write a thesis on the style of the futurists, please do not write as a futurist writes. This is important advice because nowadays many tend to write "alternative" theses, in which the rules of
critical discourse are not respected. But the language of the thesis is a *metalanguage*, that is, a language that speaks of other languages. A psychiatrist who describes the mentally ill does not express himself in the manner of his patients. I am not saying that it is wrong to express oneself in the manner of the so-called mentally ill. In fact, you could reasonably argue that they are the only ones who express themselves the way one should. But here you have two choices: either you do not write a thesis, and you manifest your desire to break with tradition by refusing to earn your degree, perhaps learning to play the guitar instead; or you write your thesis, but then you must explain to everyone why the language of the mentally ill is not a “crazy” language, and to do it you must use a metalanguage intelligible to all. The pseudo-poet who writes his thesis in poetry is a pitiful writer (and probably a bad poet). From Dante to Eliot and from Eliot to Sanguinetti, when avant-garde poets wanted to talk about their poetry, they wrote in clear prose. And when Marx wanted to talk about workers, he did not write as a worker of his time, but as a philosopher. Then, when he wrote *The Communist Manifesto* with Engels in 1848, he used a fragmented journalistic style that was provocative and quite effective. Yet again, *The Communist Manifesto* is not written in the style of *Capital*, a text addressed to economists and politicians. Do not pretend to be Dante by saying that the poetic fury “dictates deep within,” and that you cannot surrender to the flat and pedestrian metalanguage of literary criticism. Are you a poet? Then do not pursue a university degree. Twentieth-century Italian poet Eugenio Montale does not have a degree, and he is a great poet nonetheless. His contemporary Carlo Emilio Gadda (who held a degree in engineering) wrote fiction in a unique style, full of dialects and stylistic idiosyncrasies; but when he wrote a manual for radio news writers, he wrote a clever, sharp, and lucid “recipe book” full of clear and accessible prose. And when Montale writes a critical article, he writes so that all can understand him, including those who do not understand his poems.

*Begin new paragraphs often.* Do so when logically necessary, and when the pace of the text requires it, but the more you do it, the better.

Write everything that comes into your head, but only in the first draft. You may notice that you get carried away with your inspiration, and you lose track of the center of your topic. In this case, you can remove the parenthetical sentences and the digressions, or you can put each in a note or an appendix (see section 6.3). Your thesis exists to prove the hypothesis that you devised at the outset, not to show the breadth of your knowledge.

*Use the advisor as a guinea pig.* You must ensure that the advisor reads the first chapters (and eventually, all the chapters) far in advance of the deadline. His reactions may be useful to you. If the advisor is busy (or lazy), ask a friend. Ask if he understands what you are writing. Do not play the solitary genius.

*Do not insist on beginning with the first chapter.* Perhaps you have more documentation on chapter 4. Start there, with the nonchalance of someone who has already worked out the previous chapters. You will gain confidence. Naturally your working table of contents will anchor you, and will serve as a hypothesis that guides you (see section 4.1).

*Do not use ellipsis and exclamation points, and do not explain ironies.* It is possible to use language that is *referential* or language that is *figurative*. By referential language, I mean a language that is recognized by all, in which all things are called by their most common name, and that does not lend itself to misunderstandings. “The Venice-Milan train” indicates in a referential way the same object that “The Arrow of the Lagoon” indicates figuratively. This example illustrates that “everyday” communication is possible with partially figurative language. Ideally, a critical essay or a scholarly text should be written referentially (with all terms well defined and univocal), but it can also be useful to use metaphor, irony, or litotes. Here is a referential text, followed by its transcription in figurative terms that are at least tolerable:

*Referential version:* Krasnapolsky is not a very sharp critic of Daniel’s work. His interpretation draws meaning from the author’s text that the author probably did not intend. Consider the line, “in the evening gazing at the clouds.” Ritz interprets this as a normal geographical annotation, whereas...
Krasnapolsky sees a symbolic expression that alludes to poetic activity. One should not trust Ritz’s critical acumen, and one should also distrust Krasnapolsky. Hilton observes that, “If Ritz’s writing seems like a tourist brochure, Krasnapolsky’s criticism reads like a Lenten sermon.” And he adds, “Truly, two perfect critics.”

**[Figurative version with reservations]** We are not convinced that Krasnapolsky is the “sharpest” critic of Danieli’s work. In reading his author, Krasnapolsky gives the impression that he is putting words into Danieli’s mouth. Consider the line, “in the evening gazing at the clouds.” Ritz interprets it as a normal geographical annotation, whereas Krasnapolsky plays the symbolism card and sees an allusion to poetic activity. Ritz is not a “prodigy of critical insight,” but Krasnapolsky should also be “handled with care.” As Hilton ironically observes, “If Ritz’s writing seems like a tourist brochure, Krasnapolsky’s criticism reads like a Lenten sermon. Truly, two perfect critics.”

You can see that the figurative version uses various rhetorical devices. First of all, the litotes: saying that you are not convinced that someone is a sharp critic means that you are convinced that he is not a sharp critic. Also, the statement “Ritz is not a prodigy of critical insight” means that he is a modest critic. Then there are the metaphors: putting words into someone’s mouth, and playing the symbolism card. The tourist brochure and the Lenten sermon are two similes, while the observation that the two authors are perfect critics is an example of irony: saying one thing to signify its opposite.

Now, we either use rhetorical figures effectively, or we do not use them at all. If we use them, it is because we presume our reader is capable of catching them, and because we believe that we will appear more incisive and convincing. In this case, we should not be ashamed of them, and we should not explain them. If we think that our reader is an idiot, we should not use rhetorical figures, but if we use them and feel the need to explain them, we are essentially calling the reader an idiot. In turn, he will take revenge by calling the author an idiot. Here is how a timid writer might intervene to neutralize and excuse the rhetorical figures he uses:

I am convinced that nobody could be so intellectually petit bourgeois as to conceive a passage so studded with shyness and apologetic little smiles. Of course I exaggerated in this example, and here I say that I exaggerated because it is didactically important that the parody be understood as such. In fact, many bad habits of the amateur writer are condensed into this third example. First of all, the use of quotation marks to warn the reader, “Pay attention because I am about to say something big!” Puerile. Quotation marks are generally only used to designate a direct quotation or the title of an essay or short work; to indicate that a term is jargon or slang; or that a term is being discussed in the text as a word, rather than used functionally within the sentence. Secondly, the use of the exclamation point to emphasize a statement. This is not appropriate in a critical essay. If you check the book you are reading, you will notice that I have used the exclamation mark only once or twice. It is allowed once or twice, if the purpose is to make the reader jump in his seat and call his attention to a vehement statement like, “Pay attention, never make this mistake!” But it is a good rule to speak softly. The effect will be stronger if you simply say important things. Finally, the author of the third passage draws attention to the ironies, and apologizes for using them (even if they are someone else’s). Surely, if you think that Hilton’s irony is too subtle, you can write, “Hilton states with subtle irony that we are in the presence of two perfect
critics.” But the irony must be really subtle to merit such a statement. In the quoted text, after Hilton has mentioned the vacation brochure and the Lenten sermon, the irony was already evident and needed no further explanation. The same applies to the statement, “But all joking aside.” Sometimes a statement like this can be useful to abruptly change the tone of the argument, but only if you were really joking before. In this case, the author was not joking. He was attempting to use irony and metaphor, but these are serious rhetorical devices and not jokes.

You may observe that, more than once in this book, I have expressed a paradox and then warned that it was a paradox. For example, in section 2.6.1, I proposed the existence of the mythical centaur for the purpose of explaining the concept of scientific research. But I warned you of this paradox not because I thought you would have believed this proposition. On the contrary, I warned you because I was afraid that you would have doubted too much, and hence dismissed the paradox. Therefore I insisted that, despite its paradoxical form, my statement contained an important truth: that research must clearly define its object so that others can identify it, even if this object is mythical. And I made this absolutely clear because this is a didactic book in which I care more that everyone understands what I want to say than about a beautiful literary style. Had I been writing an essay, I would have pronounced the paradox without denouncing it later.

Always define a term when you introduce it for the first time. If you do not know the definition of a term, avoid using it. If it is one of the principal terms of your thesis and you are not able to define it, call it quits. You have chosen the wrong thesis (or, if you were planning to pursue further research, the wrong career).

Do not explain the location of Rome without then explaining the location of Timbuktu. It gives me chills to read sentences like, “Guzzo defined the Jewish-Dutch pantheist philosopher Spinoza ...” Stop! Either you are writing a thesis on Spinoza, and in this case your reader already knows who Spinoza is, and also you will already have informed the reader that Augusto Guzzo wrote a book on Spinoza; or you are quoting this statement tangentially in a thesis on nuclear physics, and in this case you should presume that the reader is aware of Spinoza but not of Guzzo; or you are writing a thesis on post-Gentilian philosophy in Italy, and you can expect your reader to know both Guzzo and Spinoza. Even in a thesis on history, do not write “T. S. Eliot, an English poet ...” Take it for granted that T. S. Eliot is universally known (and also consider that he was born in the United States). At most, if you wish to emphasize that it was precisely an English poet who said something particular, you will write, “It was an English poet, Eliot, who said that ...” But if you write a thesis on Eliot, have the humility to provide all the information about him in the text. If not in the text, at least provide it in a note near the beginning, and be honest and precise enough to condense all of his necessary biographical information into ten lines. The reader, as much as he may know the subject, will not necessarily have memorized Eliot’s birthday. Take this into consideration when you write a work on a minor author of past centuries. Do not presume that everyone knows of him. One never knows. Immediately introduce him, his cultural context, and so on. But even if the author was Molière, how much will it cost you to insert a note with a couple of dates?

I or we? Should the student introduce his opinions in the first person? Should he state, “I think that ...”? Some believe that this is more honest than using the majestic plural. I disagree. A writer says “we” because he presumes that his readers can share what he is saying. Writing is a social act. I write so that you as the reader accept what I propose to you. At the most, I think, the student can try to avoid personal pronouns by adopting more impersonal expressions such as, “therefore one should conclude that,” “it then seems granted that,” “one should say at this point,” “one should presume,” “therefore one infers that,” “in examining this text one sees that,” etc. It is not necessary to say, “the article that we previously quoted,” when it suffices to say, “the article previously quoted.” But I think the student can write, “the article previously quoted shows us that,” because these types of expressions do not imply any personalization of the academic discourse.
5.3 Quotations

5.3.1 When and How to Quote: 10 Rules

Generally speaking, you will quote many texts by other authors in your thesis: the textual object of your work, or the primary source or sources; and the critical literature on your topic, or the secondary sources. Therefore, practically speaking, there are two kinds of quotes: (a) quotes from a text that you will interpret; (b) quotes from a text that you will use to support your interpretation. It is difficult to say abstractly whether you should quote abundantly or sparingly. It depends on the type of thesis you are writing. A critical analysis of a writer obviously requires that large passages of his works be quoted and analyzed. In other cases, a quote can be a manifestation of laziness, for example if the candidate is unwilling or unable to summarize a collection of data and prefers to let someone else do it for him. Hence, we provide the following ten rules:

*Rule 1:* Quote the object of your interpretive analysis with reasonable abundance.

*Rule 2:* Quote the critical literature only when its authority corroborates or confirms your statements.

These two rules imply some obvious corollaries. First, if the passage you wish to analyze exceeds half a page, it means something is wrong. Either your analysis is too general and you will not be able to comment on the text point by point; or you are discussing an entire text rather than a passage, and presenting a global criticism rather than an analysis. In these cases, if the text is important but too long, present it in full in an appendix, and quote only short passages over the course of your chapters. Second, when quoting or citing critical literature, be sure that it says something new, or that it confirms *authoritatively* what you have said. The following illustrates a *useless* quote and a *useless* citation:

Mass communication constitutes, as McLuhan says, “one of the central phenomena of our time.” We should not forget that, in our country alone, two out of three individuals spend a third of their day in front of the TV, according to Savoy.

What is wrong or naïve in this example? First, that mass communication is a central phenomenon of our time is a banality that anyone could have said. I do not exclude the possibility that McLuhan himself may have said it (I did not check—I invented this quote), but it is not necessary to refer to an authority to prove something so obvious. Second, it is possible that the data on the TV audience is accurate, but Savoy does not constitute an *authority*. (In fact, it is a name I also invented.) The author of the thesis should have cited the data of the Italian Central Institute of Statistics, a sociological research project signed by renowned scholars who are beyond suspicion, or the results of his own inquiry backed up by an appendix of tables that present his data, rather than citing just any old Savoy.

*Rule 3:* If you don’t want readers to presume that you share the opinion of the quoted author, you must include your own critical remarks before or after the passage.

*Rule 4:* Make sure that the author and the source (print or manuscript) of your quote are clearly identifiable. You can do this by including one of the following: (a) a superscript number and a corresponding note (see section 5.4.2), especially when you mention the author for the first time; (b) the author’s name and the work’s publication date, in parentheses after the quote (see section 5.4.3); (c) the page number in parentheses, but only when the entire chapter (or the entire thesis) centers on the same work by the same author. Table 5.1 illustrates how you could structure a page of a thesis with the title “Epiphany in James Joyce’s Portrait.” In this case, once you have clarified to which edition you refer, cite your primary source with the page number in parentheses in the text, and cite the critical literature in the note.²

*Rule 5:* Quote your primary source from the critical edition, or the most canonical edition. In a thesis on Balzac, avoid quoting the pages from the paperback Livre de
Table 5.1
EXAMPLE OF THE CONTINUOUS ANALYSIS OF A SINGLE TEXT

The text of *Portrait* is rich with these moments of ecstasy that Joyce had already defined in *Stephen Hero* as epiphanic:

Glimmering and trembling, trembling and unfolding, a breaking light, an opening flower, it spread in endless succession to itself, breaking in full crimson and unfolding and fading to palest rose, leaf by leaf and wave of light by wave of light, flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes, every flush deeper than other. (151)

It is immediately evident that the "submarine" vision changes to the vision of a flame, in which red tones and sensations of brightness prevail. Now, we know that metaphors of fire frequently recur in *Portrait*, and that the word "fire" appears at least 59 times and variations of the word "flame" appear 35 times. Here we can see the association between fire and the epiphanic experience, and this illuminates the relations between *Portrait* and Gabriele D'Annunzio's *The Flame*. Let us examine this passage from *Portrait*:

*Or was it that, being as weak of sight as he was shy of mind, he drew less pleasure from the reflection of the glowing sensible world through the prism of a language manycoloured and richly storied ... (146)*

Here we find a stunning reference to a passage in D'Annunzio's *The Flame*,

*She was compelled into that blazing environment as though into a forge ...*

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Poche edition, and at least quote from the Pléiade edition of Balzac's complete works. In general, for ancient and classical authors it is sufficient to cite sections, chapters, and lines according to current usage (see section 3.2.3). Regarding contemporary authors, if various editions are available, it is better to cite either from the first, or from the most recent if it is revised and corrected. The first edition is preferable if the following editions are simply reprints, and the last edition is preferable if it contains revisions, additions, or updates. In any case, your reference should specify both the first edition and the most recent edition, and should clarify from which one you are quoting (see section 3.2.3).

**Rule 6:** When your primary source is foreign, quote it in the original language. This rule is mandatory for literary works. In these cases, adding a translation in parentheses or in a note may be useful, but follow your advisor's suggestions on this. Even if you are not analyzing the literary style of an author, if the exact expression of his thought, in all of its linguistic shades, has a certain weight (for example a philosopher's commentary), then you should work with the text in the original language if possible. However, I recommend that you add the translation in parentheses or in a note, because the translation also constitutes an interpretive exercise on your part. If you are taking from a foreign author only a piece of information, statistical or historical data, or a general criticism, you can simply use a good translation, or even translate the passage yourself. In this case you do not want to submit the reader to continuous jumps from one language to the other, and it is sufficient to precisely cite the original title and to clarify which translation you are using. Finally, you may find yourself discussing the texts of a foreign author who happens to be a poet or a writer of fiction, but you only wish to examine his philosophical ideas and not his literary style. Here, if there are numerous long quotes, you may also decide to refer to a good translation to render the argument more fluid, and simply insert some short passages in the original language.
when you want to emphasize the revealing use of a particular word. (See also rule 4, point c.)

Rule 7: The reference to the author and the work must be clear. The following (incorrect) example should illustrate our point:

We agree with Vasquez when he claims that “the problem under scrutiny is far from being solved” and, despite Braun's well-known opinion that “light has been definitively shed on this age-old question,” we believe with our author that “we have a long way to go before we reach a satisfying stage of knowledge.”

The first quote is certainly from Vasquez and the second from Braun, but is the third really from Vasquez, as the context implies? And since we have indicated in footnote 1 that Vasquez’s first quote comes from page 160 of his work, should we also assume that the third quote comes from the same page in the same book? And what if Braun was the source of the third quote?

Here is how we should have drafted the same passage:

We agree with Vasquez when he claims that “the problem under scrutiny is far from being solved,” and, despite Braun's well-known opinion that “light has been definitively shed on this age-old question,” we believe with our author that “we have a long way to go before we reach a satisfying stage of knowledge.”

Notice that footnote 3 indicates “Vasquez 1976, 161.” If the quote had still been from p. 160, and if it had immediately followed the previous Vasquez quote without being interrupted by the Braun quote, we could have written “ibid.” But shame on us if we had written “ibid.”

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3 Vasquez 1976, 161.

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2 Ibid.
This method is quite convenient because it immediately reveals the quoted texts; it allows the reader to skip them if he is skimming, to linger if he is more interested in the quoted texts than in our commentary, and finally, to find them immediately when need be.

**Rule 9:** Quotes must be accurate. First, transcribe the words exactly as they appear. (To this end, it is always a good idea to check the quotes against the original in your final draft, because errors or omissions may have occurred when you copied them by hand or typed them.) Second, do not omit text from a quote without indicating your omission with an *ellipsis*, three consecutive periods with or without brackets, in place of the omitted part. Third, do not make interpolations without clearly signaling them; each of our comments, clarifications, and specifications must appear enclosed in brackets. Finally, we must also indicate emphases that are ours rather than the author’s by adding, after the quote and enclosed in brackets, a formula such as “emphasis mine.”

If the author that you quote, despite his worthiness of mention, makes an evident mistake, you must respect his mistake, but you must indicate it to the reader. At the very least, indicate the mistake with the following expression enclosed in square brackets: [sic], literally meaning “so.” Thus you should write that Savoy states that, “in 1820 [sic], after Napoleon Bonaparte’s death, Europe was in a grim situation with many shadows and few lights.” But, if I were you, I would stay away from this mysterious Savoy.

**Rule 10:** Quotes are like testimony in a trial, and you must always be able to track down the witnesses and demonstrate their reliability. For this reason, the reference must be exact and accurate (do not quote from an author without indicating the book and page number), and it must be verifiable. If this is the case, how should you proceed if important information or criticism comes from a personal communication, a letter, or a manuscript? In a note, you can use one of these expressions:

1. Personal communication with the author, June 6, 1975.

You will notice that for sources 2, 4, and 5 there are related documents that you can exhibit. Source 3 is vague because the term “recording” does not specify whether you are talking about a magnetic audio recording or stenographic notes. As for source 1, only the source of the information could disprove you (but he may have died in the meantime). In these extreme cases, it is always good practice, after you have given a final form to the quote, to send a letter to the author with a copy of the text, and to ask for a letter of authorization in which he acknowledges the ideas you have attributed to him. If you are dealing with enormously important unpublished information (e.g., a new formula resulting from secret research), you should put a copy of the letter of authorization in the thesis’s appendix. Naturally, do so only if the author of the information is a well-known scholarly authority, and not any old Joe.

**Minor rules:** If you want to be precise about text you have omitted, consider punctuation marks as you insert the ellipsis (the three ellipsis periods with or without the square brackets):

If we omit a section of little importance, ... the ellipsis must follow the punctuation mark of the complete section. If we omit a central part ..., the ellipsis precedes the commas.

When you quote poetry, follow the usage of the critical literature on your topic. In any case, you can quote a single line by inserting it in the text: “la donzelletta vien dalla campagna.” You can quote two lines by inserting them into the text and separating them with a slash: “I cipressi che a Bolgheri alii e schietti / van da San Guido in duplice filar.” If instead you are dealing with a longer poetic passage, it is better to use the indentation system:
And when we are married,
How happy we'll be.
I love sweet Rosie O'Grady
And Rosie O'Grady loves me.\textsuperscript{10}

Also use the indentation system if you are dealing with
a single line that will be the object of a long analysis, for
example if you want to draw out the fundamental ele-
ments of Verlaine's poetics from the line

De la musique avant toute chose\textsuperscript{11}

In cases like this, I would say that it is not necessary to
italicize the line even if it is in a foreign language. This
especially would be the case with a thesis on Verlaine;
otherwise you would have hundreds of pages all in italics.
Rather, write,

De la musique avant toute chose
Et pour cela préfère l'impair
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose.\textsuperscript{12}

And indicate "emphasis mine" if the center of your analy-
is is the notion of l'impair.

5.3.2 Quotes, Paraphrases, and Plagiarism

When you created your readings index cards, you sum-
mized the various points of the author in question. That is to
say that you paraphrased the author, rewording the author's
thought. In other instances you quoted entire passages
enclosed in quotation marks. When you then begin writing
your thesis, you no longer have the text in front of you, and
perhaps you will copy entire passages from your index cards
into your thesis. In this case, you must be sure that the pas-
sages that you copy are really paraphrases and not quotes
without quotation marks. Otherwise, you will have committed
plagiarism.

This form of plagiarism is very common. The student
has a clean conscience because, in a footnote, he says he is
referring to that given author. But the reader becomes sus-
picious of your thesis when he notices by chance that the

page is not paraphrasing the original text, but in fact copying
it without using quotation marks. And here we are not only
talking about the advisor, but anyone else who will see your
thesis in the future, either to publish it or to evaluate your
competencies.

How can you make sure that you are paraphrasing and
not plagiarizing? First of all, a paraphrase is generally much
shorter than the original. But there are cases in which the
author of a sentence or fairly short paragraph says very juicy
things. In this case, your paraphrase should be very long,
probably longer than the original passage. Here you do not
have to worry neurotically about each of your words being
different from the author's, and in fact sometimes it is inevi-
table or even useful that some of the author's terms remain
unchanged. The most reassuring test of your paraphrases
will come when you are able to paraphrase the text without
looking at it. This will mean not only that you have avoided
plagiarism, but also that you have understood the text you
are paraphrasing.

To better illustrate this point, I will reproduce a passage
from Norman Cohn's The Pursuit of the Millennium in the
first paragraph below. Then I will provide an example of a
reasonable paraphrase in the second paragraph, and an
example of a faulty paraphrase that constitutes plagiarism
in the third paragraph. In the fourth paragraph, I will give
an example of a paraphrase almost identical to the third, but
in which I have avoided plagiarism through an honest use of
quotation marks.

[The original text:] "The coming of Antichrist was even more
tensely awaited. Generation after generation lived in con-
stant expectation of the all-destroying demon whose reign
was indeed to be lawless chaos, an age given over to robbery
and rapine, torture and massacre, but was also to be the
prelude to the longed-for consummation, the Second Com-
ing and the Kingdom of the Saints. People were always on
the watch for the 'signs' which, according to the prophetic
tradition, were to herald and accompany the final 'time of
troubles'; and since the 'signs' included bad rulers, civil dis-
cord, war, drought, famine, plague, comets, sudden deaths
of prominent persons and an increase in general sinfulness, there was never any difficulty about finding them.”  

[An honest paraphrase:] Cohn is very explicit on this topic. He outlines the state of tension typical of this period, in which the wait for Antichrist is at the same time a wait for the demon’s reign, characterized by pain and disorder; and a prelude to the so-called Second Coming, the Parousia, Christ’s triumphant return. And in an age dominated by sorrowful events including plunders, lootings, famines, and plagues, there was no lack of “signs” that the prophetic texts had always announced as typical of the coming of Antichrist.  

[Plagiarism:] On the other hand, we should not forget that the coming of Antichrist was even more tensely awaited. The generations lived in the constant expectation of the all-destroying demon whose reign was indeed to be lawless chaos, an age given over to robbery and rapine, torture and massacre, but was at the same time to be the prelude to the Second Coming or the Kingdom of the Saints. People were always on the watch for the “signs” which, as stated by the prophets, were to accompany and herald the final “time of troubles”; and since these “signs” included the bad rulers, the civil discord, the war, the drought, the famine, the plagues and the comets, and also the sudden deaths of important persons (in addition to an increase in general sinfulness), there was never any difficulty about finding them.  

[A paraphrase with quotes:] On the other hand, Cohn reminds us that “the coming of Antichrist was even more tensely awaited.” People greatly anticipated the “demon whose reign was indeed to be lawless chaos, an age given over to robbery and rapine, torture and massacre, but was also to be the prelude to the longed-for consummation, the Second Coming and the Kingdom of the Saints.” Now, Cohn concludes, given the dreadful variety of events identified by the prophetic texts as preludes of the “time of troubles,” in an age marked by plunders, lootings, famines, and plagues “there was never any difficulty about finding them.”  

Now, if you make the effort to compose a paraphrase as detailed as the fourth one, you may as well quote the entire passage. But to do so, your readings index card should have reproduced the passage verbatim, or paraphrased it beyond suspicion. Since, when you write your thesis, you will not be able to remember what you did during the research phase, it is necessary that you proceed correctly from the very beginning. If there are no quotation marks on the index card, you must be able to trust that the card contains an honest paraphrase that avoids plagiarism.  

5.4 Footnotes  

5.4.1 The Purpose of Footnotes  
According to a fairly common opinion, a thesis or a book with copious notes exhibits erudite snobbism, and often represents an attempt to pull the wool over the reader’s eyes. Certainly we should not rule out the fact that many authors abound in notes to confer a tone of importance on their work; and that others stuff their notes with nonessential information, perhaps plundering with impunity the critical literature they have examined. Nevertheless, when used appropriately, notes are useful. It is hard to define in general what is appropriate, because this depends on the type of thesis. But we will try to illustrate the cases that require notes, and how the notes should be formatted.  

1. Use a note to indicate the source of a quote. Too many bibliographical references in the text can interrupt your argument and make your text difficult to read. Naturally there are ways to integrate essential references into the
text, thus doing away with the need for notes, such as the author-date system (see section 5.4.3). But in general, notes provide an excellent way to avoid burdening the text with references. If your university doesn’t mandate otherwise, use a footnote for bibliographical references rather than an endnote (that is, a note at the end of the book or the chapter), because a footnote allows the reader to immediately spot the reference.

2. Use notes to add additional supporting bibliographical references on a topic you discuss in the text. For example, “on this topic see also so-and-so.” Also in this case, footnotes are more convenient than endnotes.

3. Use notes for external and internal cross-references. Once you have treated a topic, you can include the abbreviation “cf.” (for the Latin confer, meaning “to bring together”) in the note to refer the reader to another book, or another chapter or section of your text. If your internal cross-references are essential, you can integrate them into the text. The book you are reading provides many examples of internal cross-references to other sections of the text.

4. Use notes to introduce a supporting quote that would have interrupted the text. If you make a statement in the text and then continue directly to the next statement for fluidity, a superscript note reference after the first statement can refer the reader to a note in which a well-known authority backs up your assertion.

5. Use notes to expand on statements you have made in the text. Use notes to free your text from observations that, however important, are peripheral to your argument or

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6. Use notes to correct statements in the text. You may be sure of your statements, but you should also be conscious that someone may disagree, or you may believe that, from a certain point of view, it would be possible to object to your statement. Inserting a partially restrictive note will then prove not only your academic honesty but also your critical spirit.

7. Use notes to provide a translation of a quote, or to provide the quote in the original language. If the quote appears in its original language in the main body of the text, you can provide the translation in a note. If however you decide for reasons of fluidity to provide the quote in translation in the main text, you can repeat the quote in its original language in a note.

8. Use notes to pay your debts. Citing a book from which you copied a sentence is paying a debt. Citing an author whose ideas or information you used is paying a debt. Sometimes, though, you must also pay debts that are more difficult to document. It is a good rule of academic honesty to mention in a note that, for example, a series of original ideas in your text could not have been born without inspiration from a particular work, or from a private conversation with a scholar.

Whereas notes of types 1, 2, and 3 are more useful as footnotes, notes of types 4 through 8 can also appear at the end of the chapter or of the thesis, especially if they are very long. Yet we will say that a note should never be too long:

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1 “All important statements of fact that are not common knowledge ... must be supported by evidence of their validity. This may be done in the text, in the footnotes, or in both.” William G. Campbell and Stephen V. Ballou, Form and Style, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 50.

2 Use content notes to discuss or expand on points in the text. For example, Campbell and Ballou note that it is useful to transfer to notes “technical discussions, incidental comments, corollary materials, and additional information” (ibid.).

3 In fact, after having said that notes are useful, we must specify that, as Campbell and Ballou also mention, “the use of footnotes for the purpose of elaboration calls for considerable discretion. Care should be taken not to lose force by transferring valuable and significant facts to the footnotes; directly relevant ideas and information should be included in the text” (ibid.). On the other hand, as the authors themselves say, “Each footnote must in practice justify its existence” (ibid.). There is nothing more irritating than notes that seem inserted only to impress, and that do not say anything important to the argument.
otherwise it is not a note, it is an appendix, and it must be inserted and numbered as such at the end of the work. At any rate, be consistent: use either all footnotes or all endnotes. Also, if you use short footnotes and longer appendices at the end of the work, do this consistently throughout your thesis.

And once again, remember that if you are examining a homogeneous source, such as the work of only one author, the pages of a diary, or a collection of manuscripts, letters, or documents, you can avoid the notes simply by establishing abbreviations for your sources at the beginning of your work. Then, for every citation, insert the relevant abbreviation and the page or document number in parentheses. For citing classics, follow the conventions in section 3.2.3. In a thesis on medieval authors who are published in Jacques-Paul Migne’s *Patrologia Latina*, you can avoid hundreds of notes by putting in the text parenthetical references such as this: (PL 30.231). Proceed similarly for references to charts, tables, or illustrations in the text or in the appendix.

5.4.2 The Notes and Bibliography System

Let us now consider the note as a means for citation. If in your text you speak of an author or quote some of his passages, the corresponding note should provide the necessary documentation. This system is convenient because, if you use footnotes, the reader knows immediately what author and work you are citing. Yet this process imposes duplication because you must repeat in the final bibliography the same reference you included in the note. (In rare cases in which the note references a work that is unrelated to the specific bibliography of the thesis, there is no need to repeat the reference in the final bibliography. For example, if in a thesis in astronomy I were to cite Dante’s line, “the Love that moves the sun and all the other stars,” the note alone would suffice.)¹ The presence of the references in the note certainly does not invalidate the need for a final bibliography. In fact, the final bibliography provides the material you have consulted at a glance, and it also serves as a comprehensive source for the literature on your particular topic. It would be impolite to force the reader to search the notes page by page to find all the works you have cited.

Moreover, the final bibliography provides more complete information than do the notes. For example, in citing a foreign author, the note provides only the title in the original language, while the bibliographical entry will also include a reference to the translation. Furthermore, while usage suggests citing an author by first name and last name in a note, the bibliography presents authors in alphabetical order by last name. Additionally, if the first edition of an article appeared in an obscure journal, and the article was then reprinted in a widely available miscellaneous volume, the note may reference only the miscellaneous volume with the page number of the quote, while the bibliography will also require a reference to the first edition. A note may also abbreviate certain data or eliminate subtitles, while the bibliography should provide all this information.

Table 5.2 provides an example of a thesis page with various footnotes, and table 5.3 shows the references as they will appear in the final bibliography.² Notice the differences between the two. You will see that the notes are more casual than the bibliography, that they do not cite the first edition, and that they aim only to give enough information to enable a reader to locate the text they mention, reserving the complete documentation for the bibliography. Also, the notes do not mention whether the volume in question has been translated. After all, there is the final bibliography in which the reader can find this information.

What are the shortcomings of this system? Take for example footnote 6 of table 5.2. It tells us that Lakoff’s article is in the previously cited miscellaneous volume *Semantics*. Where was it cited? Luckily, in the same paragraph, and the reference appears in the table’s footnote 5. What if it had been cited ten pages earlier? Should we repeat the reference for convenience? Should we expect the reader to check the

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Using multiple abbreviations for journals, manuals, and conference proceedings. Below are two examples from two bibliographies, one in the natural sciences, the other in medicine. (Do not ask me what these bibliographical entries mean. Presumably readers in these fields will understand them.)


5.5 Instructions, Traps, and Conventions

The tricks of academic work are innumerable, and innumerable are the traps into which you can fall. Within the limits of this short treatment, we can only provide, in no particular order, a series of instructions to help you avoid such traps. Although these instructions may not help you navigate the Bermuda Triangle that you must cross in writing your thesis, they will at least alert you to the existence of such perils, and that you must ultimately face them on your own.

Do not credit or cite notions of common knowledge. Nobody would think of writing “Napoleon who, as Ludwig states, died in Saint Helena,” but this kind of naïveté happens often. It is easy to say, “The mechanical looms, as Marx says, marked the advent of the industrial revolution,” though this was a universally accepted notion even before Marx.

Do not attribute to an author an idea that he cites as belonging to someone else. Not only because you will appear to have used an indirect source unmindfully, but also because that author might have cited the idea without accepting it. In a little semiotics manual of mine, I cited, among the various possible classifications of signs, one that divides them into expressive and communicative versions. I then found in a student paper the assertion that, “according to Eco, signs are divided between the expressive and communicative.” However, I have always been opposed to this coarse subdivision. I had cited it for objectivity, but I did not appropriate it.

Do not add or delete notes only to force the numbering to add up. When you have already typewritten your thesis (or even...
if you have simply written it legibly for the typist), it may happen that you must eliminate a note that turned out to be incorrect, or that you must add a new one at any cost. As a result the numbering of the following notes does not add up, and good for you if you have numbered notes by chapter and not from the very beginning of your thesis. (It is one thing to correct notes from 1 to 10, another to correct them from 1 to 150.) To avoid changing all the note reference numbers, you will be tempted to insert a filler note or eliminate another note. This temptation is human. But in these cases it is better to insert an additional superscript sign, such as a plus (+) sign, to refer the reader to the inserted note. However, this is surely a makeshift solution that may displease some advisors, so rearrange the numbering if you can.

There is a method for citing from indirect sources while still observing the rules of academic honesty. It is always better not to cite secondhand information, but sometimes this is impossible to avoid. Two systems are common, depending on the situation. First, let us suppose that Sedanelli quoted from Smith the statement that “The language of bees is translatable in terms of transformational grammar.” In this case, we wish to highlight that Sedanelli assumes responsibility for this statement. We will then say in a note, using a not-so-elegant formula:


In the second case we wish to highlight that the statement belongs to Smith, and we quote Sedanelli only to assuage our conscience, since we are taking Smith’s quote from a secondhand source. We will then write the note:


Always give precise information on critical editions, revisions, and the like. Specify if an edition is a critical edition and indicate its editor. Specify if a second or more recent edition is revised, enlarged, or corrected. Otherwise you risk misrepresenting the opinions that an author expressed in the 1970 revised edition of his 1940 work as if he had actually expressed them in 1940, when some discoveries had perhaps not yet been made.

Pay attention when you quote a pre-1900 author from foreign sources. Different cultures name the same figures differently. For instance, while we Italians refer to “Pietro Ispino” and the French to “Scot Brégéne,” in English you will find “Peter of Spain” and “Scotus Eriugena.” In an Italian text you will encounter “Nicholas of Cusa” in the form of “Nicholo Cusano,” and you should easily recognize personalities like “Petrarque” or “Petrarca,” “Michel-Angel,” “Vinci,” and “Boccace.” “Roberto Grossatesta” in Italian appears as “Roberto Grosseseste” in English, “Alberto Magno” as “Albert the Great,” and “San Tommaso d’Aquino” as simply “Aquinas.” The person known in Italian as “Anselmo d’Aosta” appears in English as “Anselm of Canterbury.” Do not speak of two painters when you refer to “Roger van der Weyden” and “Rogier de la Pasture,” because they are one and the same. "Giove" is "Jupiter," naturally. Also, pay attention when you are copying Russian names from an old French source. You would probably avoid writing "Stalinie" or "Lenine," but you may still fall for "Ouspenksy," when you should instead transliterate "Uspenskiy." The same applies to names of cities: "Den Haag," "La Haye," and "La Aia" all refer to "The Hague."

How do we learn these naming conventions, of which there are many hundreds? We read various texts in various languages on the same topic. We join the club. Music lovers know “the King” is Elvis Presley, sports fans know that "Doctor J" is Julius Erving, and American high school students know that “Mark Twain” is Samuel Clemens. Those who do not know these things are considered naïve or provincial. A literature student who discusses in his thesis the relationship between Aroutel and Voltaire after reading a few secondary sources might be considered “ignorant” instead of merely provincial.14

Pay attention when you find numbers in foreign texts. For instance, in an Italian book you will find 2.825 for two
thousand six hundred twenty-five, while 2,25 means two and twenty-five hundredths.

Pay attention to references to centuries in foreign sources. For instance, in Italian you will find references to Cinquecento, Settecento, Novecento and not the XVI (sixteenth), XVIII (eighteenth), and XX (twentieth) centuries. However, in a French or English book the Italian word Quattrocento indicates a precise period of Florentine culture. Do not make facile equivalencies among different languages. The Italian Rinascimento covers a different period than the Renaissance, since it excludes seventeenth-century authors. Manierismo is another tricky term because it refers to a specific period in Italian art history, and not to what is known in English as mannerism, or in German as Manierismus.

Acknowledgments. If someone other than your advisor provided verbal suggestions, lent you rare books, or gave you similar kinds of help, it is good practice to acknowledge them in a section at the beginning or end of your thesis. It also shows that you were diligent enough to consult knowledgeable people. However, it is bad taste to thank your advisor if he helped you, he has simply done his job.

Additionally, you may happen to thank and to declare your debt to a scholar that your advisor hates, abhors, and despises. This is a serious academic incident, and it is your fault. You should have trusted your advisor, and if he told you that someone is an imbecile, you should not have consulted that person. Or, if your advisor is open-minded and he accepts that his student has used resources with which he disagrees, this incident will simply become a matter of civil discussion at your thesis defense. If instead your advisor is an old capricious baron, spiteful and domineering, you have probably made the wrong choice for an advisor. However, if, despite these flaws, you truly wanted this advisor because you believed that he would treat you like a protégé, then you must be coherently dishonest and ignore this other person in your acknowledgments, because you have chosen to become the same kind of person that your mentor is.

5.6 Academic Pride

In section 4.2.4 we discussed academic humility, which concerns the research method and the interpretation of texts. Now let us discuss academic pride, which concerns confidence in writing.

There is nothing more annoying than a thesis in which the author continuously gives unsolicited excuses (and this sometimes even happens in published books):

We are not qualified to deal with such a topic. Nevertheless we would like to venture a guess that ...

What do you mean, you are not qualified? You have devoted months and maybe years to the topic you have chosen, you have presumably read everything there was to read on it, you have reflected on it, taken notes, and now you say that you are not qualified? But what have you been doing all this time? If you do not feel qualified, do not defend your thesis. If you defend it, it is because you feel ready, and in this case you have no right to make excuses. So, once you have illustrated other scholars’ opinions, once you have illuminated the particular difficulties of the issue, and once you have clarified that there can be alternative answers to a specific question, jump in at the deep end. Have no qualms about saying, “we think that …” or, “it is possible to think that …” When you speak, you are the expert. If you are to be exposed as a fraud because you have not done rigorous work, shame on you, but you have no right to hesitate if you have done good work. On your specific topic, you are humanity’s functionary who speaks in the collective voice. Be humble and prudent before opening your mouth, but once you open it, be dignified and proud.

By writing a thesis on topic X, you assume that nobody has discussed this topic so exhaustively or clearly before you. Throughout this book I have shown that you must be cautious in choosing a topic, that you must be wary enough to settle on a topic that is extremely limited, perhaps very easy, and perhaps despicably specialized. But on the topic you have chosen, be it even “Variations in Newspaper Sales at the Newsagent on the Corner of Washington and State during
the First Week of August 1976," on that topic you must be the utmost living authority. And even if you have chosen a literature survey in which you summarize all that has been said on a topic without adding anything new, you are the authority on what has been said by the other authorities. Nobody must know better than you all that has been said on that topic. Naturally, you must work with a clear conscience. But this is another story. Here I am discussing a matter of style. Do not whine and be complex-ridden, because it is annoying.

Attention: the following chapter is not printed but instead typewritten. It provides a model of the thesis's final draft. The final draft entails two specific documents: the final written draft, and the final typewritten draft. It may first seem like writing the final draft is your responsibility and that this is wholly a conceptual issue, whereas typing is a manual matter that is the responsibility of the typist. But this is not really the case. Giving a typewritten form to a thesis also means making some methodological choices. If the typist makes them for you, following certain standards, your thesis will still have a specific graphic-expository format that also affects its content. It is more desirable that you make these choices yourself, and in this case, any kind of draft you have adopted (writing by hand, typing with a single finger, or——horror——using the tape recorder) must contain formatting instructions for the typist.

For these reasons, you will find formatting instructions in this chapter that will help you impose a conceptual order as well as a "communicative façade" on your thesis. Also, you may or may not use the services of a typist. You could type it yourself, especially if your work requires special graphic conventions. You may be able to type at least a first typewritten draft on your own, and the typist will have only to clean up what you have already formatted. The question here is whether you can type, or can learn to type. If the answer is yes to either, remember that a used typewriter costs less than paying a typist to type your thesis.