How to write a citable passage

From what I see, selection happens on the single passage more than on the page. If that is right, the skill that matters most is writing a paragraph that stands on its own. This card is the practical part.

The three things it holds

Claim

What is true. One thing, stated positively and open to checking.

Evidence

Why it is true: a figure, an order of magnitude, a condition somebody can verify.

Attribution

Who says so and when, if it is a figure. In the same sentence, not at the foot of the page.

Turning the opening around

School teaches context, development, conclusion. For a reader starting at the top it works. For a reader landing halfway down after one thing it works badly, and today that reader is the common case. The first sentence after each heading holds the answer, and the context follows right after.

OPENING TO AVOID	OPENING THAT HOLDS
"The subject of rising damp is complex and deserves a closer look."	"Rising damp shows up as a horizontal tidemark on the lower part of the wall, usually within a metre and a half, often with whitish salt efflorescence."
"Many people ask what a bathroom refit costs. Let us look at it together."	"Refitting a 5 m² bathroom in Italy costs between 6,000 and 12,000 euro all in, with the plumbing work accounting for about a third of the total."
"Choosing a management system is a strategic decision."	"A management system pays off once monthly order lines pass a hundred: below that a well-kept spreadsheet costs less and makes fewer mistakes."

Two complete rewrites

Same subject, same length, completely different information. Under each one is the reasoning, because a rewrite without the reason teaches nothing.

Example 1 · What a CRM costs

BEFORE

The cost of a CRM varies considerably depending on business requirements and the number of users involved. It is important to assess your needs carefully before choosing.

AFTER

A CRM for a small Italian company costs between 12 and 40 euro per user per month. The lower band covers contact management only; above 25 euro you get sales automation and integration with electronic invoicing. The sharpest jump comes between five and twenty users, where almost every vendor changes plan.

WHAT CHANGED

- The claim is there: a price range, with the unit and the scope (small Italian company, per user, per month).
- The evidence is there: what separates the lower band from the upper one, and where the jump sits.
- The length is the same. I did not add words, I removed the assessments and put the numbers in.
- The paragraph makes sense extracted: you do not need to know what the previous one said.

Example 2 · Whether to treat rising damp

BEFORE

Many people wonder whether it is worth treating rising damp. There is no single answer, and it depends on several factors that are best assessed case by case with the help of a specialist.

AFTER

Rising damp is worth treating once the tidemark goes above 50 cm from the floor or salt efflorescence appears: below that, dehumidifying the room is often enough. The specialist is there to choose between a chemical barrier and a dehumidifying render, not to establish whether there is a problem.

WHAT CHANGED

- The threshold makes the claim checkable: the reader can walk to the wall and measure.
- The specialist is still there, but after the answer and with a defined job. Before, it was a way of not answering.
- The two possible treatments appear: the passage becomes useful to someone about to ask for a quote.

The test, in ten seconds

Take any paragraph from one of your pages. Copy it, paste it into an empty document and read it again. Then ask these three questions.

1. Can you tell what it is about?

If not: The explicit subject is missing. There is almost always a pronoun pointing back to the previous paragraph: replace it with the name of the thing.

2. Does it state something you can check?

If not: It is a transition passage. A few are fine, but they must not be the majority.

3. If it holds a figure, are the source and date inside it?

If not: Bring them into the same sentence. "More than half of results pages" cannot be quoted; "54.15% of the Italian results pages analysed (SEOZoom, December 2025, about 30 million keywords)" can.

What does not matter

- Paragraph length. Google prescribes none. Whether a paragraph stands up depends on the logic, not the character count: it can manage in four lines and fail in twelve.
- Rewriting everything as questions and answers. FAQs work where there are real questions; turning an analysis into thirty pairs gives a worse text, and worse texts get cited less.
- Markup. Google states that no special markup is required to appear in AI Overviews. Structured data is there to declare the entity, not to get a paragraph cited.

IN ONE LINE

An article where almost every paragraph passes the test reads better, as well as being cited more. That is why the work is worth doing even if Google switched AI Overviews off tomorrow.

Davide Filiaggi, aioverview.it · published by RankWit AI · the current version lives at aioverview.it/en/downloads/passaggio-citabile

Print it, pass it to colleagues, use it in a classroom. If you quote it, quote the source.