

Integrating Quotations from a Literary Text into a Literary Analysis Paper

As you choose quotations for a literary analysis, remember the purpose of quoting. Your paper develops an argument about what the author of the text is doing--how the text "works." You use quotations to support this argument; that is, you select, present, and discuss material from the text specifically to "prove" your point--to make your case--in much the same way a lawyer brings evidence before a jury.

Quoting for any other purpose is counterproductive. Don't quote to "tell the story" or otherwise convey basic information about the text; assume the reader knows the text. Don't quote just for the sake of quoting or just to fill up space. Don't make the reader jump up and shout "Irrelevant!"

This handout presents (1) general guidelines about the use of quotations in a literary analysis; (2) suggestions about ways to combine quoted material with your own prose; (3) "nuts and bolts" information about format and various rules for handling text.

We Know What Shakespeare Wrote--We Don't Know How You Read It

The following paragraph is from a student's analysis of the relationship between two characters in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Notice how statements expressing the writer's ideas and observations are verified with evidence from the novel in both summarized and quoted form.

We learn about Mrs. Ramsey's personality by observing her feelings about other characters. For example, Mrs. Ramsey has mixed feelings toward Mr. Tansley, but her feelings seem to grow more positive over time as she comes to know him better. At first Mrs. Ramsey finds Mr. Tansley annoying, as shown especially when he mentions that no one is going to the lighthouse (52). But rather than hating him, at this point she feels pity: "she pitied men always as if they lacked something . . ." (85). Then later, during the gathering, pity turns to empathy as she realizes that Mr. Tansley must feel inferior. He must know, Mrs. Ramsey thinks, that "no woman would look at him with Paul Rayley in the room" (106). Finally, by the end of the dinner scene, she feels some attraction to Mr. Tansley and also a new respect: "She liked his laugh. . . . She liked his awkwardness. There was a lot in that man after all" (110). In observing this evolution in her attitude, we learn more about Mrs. Ramsey than we do about Mr. Tansley. The change in Mrs. Ramsey's attitude is not used by Woolf to show that Mrs. Ramsey is fickle or confused; rather it is used to show her capacity for understanding both the frailty and complexity of human beings. This is a central characteristic of Mrs. Ramsey's personality.

The contents of a literary analysis. Notice that this paragraph includes three basic kinds of materials: (a) statements expressing the student's own ideas about the relationship Woolf is creating; (b) data or evidence from the text in summarized, paraphrased, and quoted form; and (c) discussion of how the data support the writer's interpretation. The quotations are used in accordance with the writer's purpose, i.e. to show how the development of Mrs. Ramsey's feelings indicates something about her personality.

Quoting vs. the alternatives. Quoting is only one of several ways to present textual material as evidence. You can also refer to textual data, summarize, and paraphrase. You will often want merely to refer or point to passages (as in the third sentence above) that contribute to your argument. In other cases you will want to paraphrase, i.e. "translate" the original into your own words, again instead of quoting. Summarize or paraphrase when it is not so much the language of the text that justifies your position, but the substance or content.

Quoting selectively. Similarly, after you have decided that you do want to use material in quoted form, quote only the portions of the text specifically relevant to your point. Think of the text in terms of units-- words, phrases, sentences, and groups of sentences (paragraphs, stanzas)--and use only the units you need. If it is particular words or phrases that "prove" your point, you do not need to quote the sentences they appear in; rather, incorporate the words and phrases into sentences expressing your own ideas.

Patterns for Incorporating Quotations into Sentences

It is permissible to quote an entire sentence (between two sentences of your own), but in general you should avoid this method of bringing textual material into your discussion. Instead, use one of the following patterns.

An introducing phrase or orienter plus the quotation:

- ✓ In this poem it is creation, not a hypothetical creator, that is supremely awesome. [argument sentence]. The speaker asks, "What immortal hand or eye / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?" [data sentence; orienter before quote]
- ✓ Gatsby is not to be regarded as a personal failure. [argument sentence] "Gatsby turned out all right at the end" (176), according to Nick. [data sentence; orienter after quote]
- ✓ "I know you blame me," Mrs. Compson tells Jason (47). [data sentence; orienter after quote] Is she expressing her own sense of guilt? [argument sentence]

An assertion of your own and a colon plus the quotation:

- ✓ Vivian hates the knights for scorning her, and she dreams of achieving glory by destroying Merlin's: "I have made his glory mine" (390).
- ✓ Fitzgerald gives Nick a muted tribute to the hero: "Gatsby turned out all right at the end" (176).
- ✓ Cassio represents not only a political but also a personal threat to Iago: "He hath a daily beauty in his life / That makes me ugly . . ." (5.1.19-20).

An assertion of your own with quoted material worked in:

- ✓ For Nick, who remarks that Gatsby "turned out all right" (176), the hero deserves respect but perhaps does not inspire great admiration.

- ✓ Satan's motion is many things; he "rides" through the air (63), "rattles" (65), and later explodes, "wanders and hovers" like a fire (293).
- ✓ Even according to Cleopatra, Mark Antony's "duty" is to the Roman state.

Clarity and Readability: Some Guidelines

- Introduce a quotation either by indicating what it is intended to show or by naming its source, or both. For non-narrative poetry, it's customary to attribute quotations to "the speaker"; for a story with a narrator, to "the narrator." For plays, novels, and other works with characters, identify characters as you quote them.
- Do not use two quotations in a row, without intervening material of your own.
- Tense is a tricky issue. It's customary in literary analysis to use the present tense; it is at the present time that you (and your reader) are looking at the text. But events in a narrative or drama take place in a time sequence. You will often need to use a past tense to refer to events that took place before the moment you are presently discussing:

When he hears Cordelia's answer, Lear seems surprised, but not dumbfounded. He advises her to "mend [her] speech a little." He had expected her to praise him the most; but compared to her sisters', her remarks seem almost insulting (1.1.95).

Nuts and Bolts

Documentation

- ✓ Follow your course instructor's guidelines for documenting sources. If your instructor hasn't told you which system to use to document sources, ask.
- ✓ The documentation style used in this handout is that presented in the 1988 MLA Handbook, but other style systems are commonly used. The Writing Center has information about the rules of documentation in general and about a number of the most common systems.

To indent or not to indent

- ✓ Prose or verse quotations less than four lines long are not indented. For quotations of this length, use the patterns described above.
- ✓ Indent "longer" quotations in a block about ten spaces in from the left margin; when a quotation is indented, quotation marks are not used. The MLA Handbook recommends that indented quotations be double-spaced, but many instructors prefer them single-spaced. The meaning of "longer" varies slightly from one style system to another, but a general rule is to indent quotations that are more than two (or three) lines of verse or three (or four) lines of prose.

- ✓ Indent dialogue between characters in a play. Place the speaker's name before the speech quoted:

CAESAR: Et tu, Brute! Then, fall, Caesar!
 CINNA: Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead! (3.1.77-78)

Exactitude in quotations

- ✓ If for the sake of brevity you wish to omit material from a quoted passage, use ellipsis points (three spaced periods) to indicate the omission. (See the paragraph on *To the Lighthouse*, above. The writer quoted only those portions of the original sentences that related to the point of the analysis.)
- ✓ When quoting, you may alter grammatical forms such as the tense of a verb or the person of a pronoun so that the quotation conforms grammatically to your own prose; indicate these alterations by placing square brackets around the changed form. See the quotation at the end of the previous section: "her" replaces the "your" of the original so that the quote fits the point of view of the paper (third person).
- ✓ Reproduce the spelling, capitalization, and internal punctuation of the original exactly. Of the following sentences presenting D. H. Lawrence's thought, "Books are not life," the first is not acceptable in some style systems.

For Lawrence, "books are not life." [UNACCEPTABLE]

For Lawrence, "[b]ooks are not life." [acceptable but awkward]

Lawrence wrote, "Books are not life." [acceptable]

"Books," Lawrence wrote, "are not life." [acceptable]

For Lawrence, books "are not life." [acceptable]

Punctuation of quotations

- ✓ You may alter the closing punctuation of a quote in order to incorporate it into a sentence of your own:

"Books are not life," Lawrence emphasized.

- ✓ Commas and periods go inside the closing quotation marks; the other punctuation marks go outside.

Lawrence insisted that books "are not life"; however, he wrote exultantly about the power of the novel.

Why does Lawrence need to point out that "Books are not life"?

- ✓ When quoting lines of poetry up to three lines long (which are not indented), separate one line of poetry from another with a slash mark (see examples on page 2, above).