

ENGL 1102: Quoting and Using Textual Evidence

Resource adapted from the University of Vermont Writing Center's website:

<https://www.uvm.edu/wid/writingcenter/tutortips/engsupport.html>

WHY DIRECT QUOTATIONS?: The use of direct quotations (in the form of quotes from the text, visuals with explanatory captions, or other forms of “quotes”) is an important part of constructing effective arguments about media, literature, and other cultural texts.

IMPORTANT: Think of quotations as **evidence** for your main point/argument. If used correctly, quotations will make your argument stronger, but they cannot stand by themselves (i.e. the reader needs to know the evidence's purpose). For example, in a murder trial a piece of evidence might be a bloody rag. However, this evidence is useless unless it is clear whose rag it is, where it was found, and what it implies for the trial.

- Make sure that readers know the **purpose** and **context** for every quotation in your piece.
- **Introduce** each quotation and **draw a conclusion** from it. This conclusion must *relate to your thesis and thus connect to the main argument of your paper*.
- Alfred Rosa and Paul Eschholz, authors of *The Writer's Pocket Handbook* (2nd ed, Pearson Education, 2003), make the following suggestions:
 - “When you are considering using a quotation, ask yourself three questions:
 - How well does the quotation illustrate or support my analysis?
 - Is this quotation the best evidence of the point I am making?
 - Why am I quoting the text instead of paraphrasing or summarizing it?” (169)
- Use "signal phrases" to introduce quotations and integrate them into the flow of your paper. Signal phrases tell the reader who is speaking and indicate where your ideas end and someone else's begin.
 - "Verbs that you should keep in mind when constructing signal phrases include the following (Rosa and Eschholz 168):

○ Acknowledges	○ Grants
○ Adds	○ Implies
○ Admits	○ Insists
○ Believes	○ Points out
○ Compares	○ Reasons
○ Confirms	○ Reports
○ Declares	○ Responds
○ Endorses	○ Suggests

- Consider the following example:
 - *McTeague*, by Frank Norris, suggests that man's natural instincts are often evil in nature. Norris illustrates this in the scene when Trina is lying unconscious in McTeague's dentist chair. Suddenly McTeague is overcome with the urge to take advantage of her. He battles with his conscience but ultimately loses, unable to stop himself from kissing Trina on the mouth. "He could only oppose to it [the foul stream of hereditary evil] an instinctive stubborn resistance, blind, inert" (23).
- Now look at what happens when a signal phrase is used and a conclusion is drawn
 - *McTeague*, by Frank Norris, suggests that man's natural instincts are often evil in nature. Norris illustrates this in the scene when Trina is lying unconscious in McTeague's dentist chair. Suddenly McTeague is overcome with the urge to take advantage of her. He battles with his conscience, but ultimately loses, unable to stop himself from kissing Trina on the mouth. *Norris suggests that McTeague does not have the capability to reason with his impulse, that "he could only oppose to it an instinctive stubborn resistance, blind, inert" (23). Here, McTeague portrays sexual longing as something that needs to be controlled; it is an instinct that must be battled.*
- Observe how in the second example, the signal phrase introduces the quotation and integrates it into the body of the paragraph. Also, note how the author draws a conclusion from the quotation, relating it to the essay's main idea.
- Although there is no rule against starting a sentence with a quotation, when learning how to incorporate quotations effectively you might want to avoid doing so. Starting a quotation mid-sentence often forces you to include a signal phrase; however, this is not always the case. Also, signal phrases are not always sufficient to provide the reader with the citation's context so be sure to provide necessary background.
- Use direct quotations only when the specific wording the author uses is essential to providing your analysis. A good trick is this: if you are unable to paraphrase the original wording without destroying the meaning/conclusion that you would like to draw from a particular quotation, then it is best to leave that quote as is.
- For the same reason, avoid using long (over four lines) quotations too frequently when you can simply mention them.
- When talking about ideas that do not necessarily require the direct quote, use paraphrasing instead (but still document where in the text this idea or situation is being discussed/occurring).
- In general, quote the least amount of the text that conveys the point you are trying to make.

- Make sure that you quote accurately. Copy the text and punctuation exactly as they appear in the source from which you are quoting. If you need to change a pronoun or the tense of a verb (or anything about the sentence) in order to integrate the quote into the flow of your paper, use brackets ([]) to indicate the changes you've made.
- Try not to get attached to any one quote. Even if it “sounds good,” it may not be the best piece of evidence for your argument. Likewise, remember to not just ignore evidence that seems to go against what you are arguing (see our note on not ignoring [contradictory evidence](#))
- It takes practice to be able to incorporate quotations effectively—work hard and keep at it!

Examples of quotations used as textual evidence in various types of literature papers:

1. [Classic Literature Paper](#)
2. [Comparative](#)
3. [Historical/Contextual Essay](#)
4. [Personal Response Essay](#)

IMPORTANT: The use of lengthy quotes for evidence is not required and is actually quite rare. **The important part is the debrief/interpretation that follows a quotation or other piece of direct evidence: that debrief should be detailed, specific, explanatory, and tie back into your argument.** Textual analysis and “close reading” involves sustained, thoughtful, critical analysis of any kind of evidence (usually a short quote(s), maybe even just a few words) structured in the following way:

SET UP ⇒ QUOTE / EVIDENCE ⇒ DEBRIEF / INTERPRETATION ⇒ TIE-IN TO ARGUMENT