

Spring 2013 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts  
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### Title of Writing Exercises: Using Quotations

Overview: A handout for an advanced in-class lesson on using quotations to strengthen students' writing style as well as to provide evidence in an argumentative essay. There is also an exercise component that can be done either in-class or as homework for students to do peer evaluations or to critique their own work.

Background: Often students think about quotations as a necessary evil, collecting scattered bits of text that might be useful as evidence and that can be cut and pasted into their drafts. As a result, quotations are often seen as separate from the process of writing itself. In my first year as a first year writing seminar instructor, teaching my students how to use quotations meant emphasizing that textual evidence was needed in every paragraph, that quotations needed to be integrated, and that quotations should always be cited properly. My students would pick up these lessons in the first half of the term, but after that point I would sometimes find myself unsatisfied with their usages of quotations that could still seem rather basic or perfunctory despite fulfilling these criteria. It was during my second year of teaching, as I continued to improve my abilities as a writing instructor, that I developed this lesson to help students become more aware and more precise about their usage of quotations, and to challenge them to use quotations on a more advanced level to enhance their argument and their writing style.

Rationale: This lesson should come later in the term, after the instructor has already established the basics about the importance of using, integrating, and citing quotations. It is recommended that they have a draft of a paper on hand so they can complete the exercise component.

The first part of the handout outlines the uses of quotations with examples from the works we have studied: 1) and 2) are stylistic while 3) and 4) are argumentative. Typically students gravitate toward type 3 "verification" because they understand quotations in the general sense as evidence backing up their claims, often to verify details and events; the challenge is to push our students to use quotation type 4 "object of analysis" in order to deepen their arguments through more precise analysis. Type 1 "tone" and type 2 "description" are meant to enable students to think about quotations in a more creative way than just as evidence: they can use quotations to enhance their own writing style and show a deeper familiarity with the text that draws in the reader into their argument. What is important to emphasize is that a combination of all these four types of quotation usages helps to create an essay that is not only well argued, but that is inventive and fun to read.

The second part of the handout shows students different ways they can integrate quotations in order to break up the monotony that is often either the continual use of the verb "says" or the colon introduction. Having students brainstorm new verbs to integrate their quotations and having them practice different ways to integrate quotations helps make them aware of how they are presenting the quotation.

The exercise makes students practice this new way of seeing quotations by working with either their own drafts or a partner's. They have to identify how quotations are used and integrated, with suggestions for how to use and present quotations in a more creative and advanced fashion.

Results: My students' next paper showed a definite improvement in their use of quotations, making their essays' arguments stronger as well as more interesting to read. I also learned how to draw upon my experiences as a teacher in order to address my students' writing issues with more care and precision in my lessons.

### Using Quotations

Using evidence may seem like the simplest part of an argumentative essay: after all, when it comes to quotations you just chop out the relevant bits of text to support your argument and you're good, right? Just make sure you integrate your quotations. Not quite – you can use quotations to varying degrees of effectiveness in relation to style and argumentation. Please note that these usages may overlap.

#### Possible Ways to Use a Quotation (ranked from least to most crucial to your argument)

##### 1. Tone

Example: “Watch out please! New meat coming through.” In *Mean Girls* we enter high school through the eyes of Cady Heron, seeing its social world as a strange combination of propriety and savagery.

Use: Setting up the hook of your introduction.

##### 2. Description

Example: “A New England Nun” opens with an idyllic picture of the New England countryside where “[s]omewhere in the distance cows were lowing and a little bell was tinkling” (1).

Use: The descriptive use of a quotation integrates it into a part of the sentence without the use of a colon. While nothing is being argued directly, this usage can help to make the language of the essay more varied and gives more character. However, overuse can lead to just summary rather than argumentation.

##### 3. Verification

Example: Transgressions do not exist in an ethical void. Even in the midst of sadistic depravity, johns like secretlifer34 still seem aware of the moral ramifications of their actions: he claims “I had a pang of conscience” (31).

Use: This is the most obvious use of a quotation as evidence. When you make specific claims about actions or other details, particularly when they are crucial to your argument or might be subtle or controversial, you need quotations. A good use of verification quotations shows your careful attention to what you are analyzing. Irrelevant verification quotations weaken your paper.

##### 4. Object of Analysis

Example: Eliza states her feelings about marriage, claiming that “Marriage is the tomb of friendship” (24). Her powerful use of metaphor suggests the disproportionate centrality of the social institution. Sadly, the word “tomb” also foreshadows her eventual fate for rejecting marriage conventions.

Use: This is the most powerful argumentative use of quotations. While the quotation itself can be integrated and used as in 2 and 3, the level of analysis is what sets this use apart because you are examining the quotation **itself** as evidence rather than as evidence for an event/action etc.

In your writing you will ideally want to use a combination of these four types of quotation usages. Each paragraph should have uses of types 3 and 4, with 4 as the gold standard.

### How to Integrate Quotations

- Part of a sentence.
  - While early in the novel Eliza claims “Marriage is the tomb of friendship,” the tragic ending of *The Coquette* shows the reverse to be true: friendship becomes Eliza’s tomb (24).
  - According to Eliza, “Marriage is the tomb of friendship” (24).
- Breaking up the quotation.
  - “Marriage,” Eliza writes to Lucy, “is the tomb of friendship” (24).
- Colon introduction.
  - Not all early American women were content with the cult of domesticity: “Marriage is the tomb of friendship,” declares Eliza (24).

Note: Try to vary the verbs you use to introduce a quotation rather than relying upon the old standby “says.” What other verbs can you think of? Brainstorm **3** and write them here: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Exercise

1. Take your paper (or your partner’s) and flip through to make note of all the quotations used. Underline quotations that are not integrated. (Hopefully none!)
2. Go back through and evaluate the use of each quotation according to the above possibilities. How was the quotation used? Mark the quotation with the number(s) that indicate its usage.
3. Are the quotations only integrated in one fashion?
4. Are the same verbs used to introduce the quotation? Suggest a synonym.
5. Can you figure out how to use the quotation more effectively and push it into type 3 or 4?