

Quoting Effectively

Quotations are important sources of evidence in all college papers. Knowing how much to quote is something you will learn through experience. There are other common problems with quotations that are easier to address.

What's wrong with the following quotation?

"They expected her alone to keep the traditional ways" (Kingston 1571). Gender roles are stricter for women than they are for men.

Where does this quotation appear in the story? Why is it suddenly here? The quotation is self-contained and hasn't been integrated into the other sentence, and so makes for choppy reading. Instead of providing evidence for the ideas in the essay, the quotation is a disruption. This is known as a floating quotation.

How about this quotation?

The narrator in Kingston's "No Name Woman" feels a connection with her deceased aunt. "I hexed myself also—no dates" (1574). Even though they never met, the narrator finds parts of herself in her aunt's story.

Here the point is clear and there is some lead in to the quotation, but it's unclear how the quotation is related. How does this line show that the narrator is similar to her aunt? There needs to be some explanation. A quotation doesn't argue itself.

Guidelines for an effective quotation

First, make sure you understand the point you are trying to make. If you don't know what you are saying, there is no quotation in the world that will help you.

Second, make sure that the quotation you want to use actually relates to the point you are making. Reread the quotation and the section from the source to make sure you have interpreted the quotation correctly. Unrelated quotations don't show only sloppiness, they show that you have misunderstood the material in the class.

Once you have done the first two steps, then you are ready to integrate your quotation into your essay. There are three parts to remember. Students tend to focus on the middle part, which is the quotation itself, but the quotation is just the meat of your sandwich. It needs to be supported between two slices of bread. Here are the three parts of the "quotation sandwich":

- **Introduce quotation.**

A quotation is an interruption. Suddenly someone else's words are intruding into your essay. To reduce the interruption, lead into the quotation. Provide the relevant context and introduce the person you are quoting in a signal phrase.

- **Provide quotation.**

Make sure the language is exact. Make necessary grammatical changes and put those changes in brackets. Show removed words with an ellipsis mark.

- **Explain the significance of quotation.**

A quotation is supposed to be used as evidence in your essay. You always need to explain how your evidence proves the point you are trying to make.

Two ways to integrate a quotation

Attributed quotation. Lead into the quotation by naming the author and/or the circumstance in the literature that the quotation refers to.

The narrator realizes that she too is part the silencing of her aunt's voice: "they want me to participate in her punishment. And I have" (Kingston 1576).

Integrated quotation. This is usually more effective. Here, you smoothly make the quotation part of your own sentence.

The narrator realizes that she too has "[participated] in her [aunt's] punishment" (Kingston 1576).