



Who Said What? Introducing and Contextualizing Quotations

Quotations (as well as paraphrases and summaries) play an essential role in academic writing, from literary analyses to scientific research papers; they are part of a writer's ever-important evidence, or support, for his or her argument. But oftentimes, writers aren't sure how to incorporate quotes and thus shove them into paragraphs without much attention to logic or style. For better quotations (and better writing), try these tips.

Identify clearly where the borrowed material begins.

The quotation should include a signal phrase, or introductory statement, which tells the reader whom or what you are citing. The phrase may indicate the author's name or credentials, the title of the source, and/or helpful background information.

Sample signal phrases: • According to (author/article) • Author + verb

Some key verbs: says, writes, accepts, criticizes, describes, disagrees, discusses, explains, identifies, insists, offers, points out, suggests, warns.

- **According to** scholar Mary Poovey, Shelley's narrative structure, which allows the creature to speak from a first-person point of view, forces the reader "to identify with [the creature's] anguish and frustration" (259).
- In an introduction to Frankenstein in 1831, the author Mary Shelley **describes** even her own creative act with a sense of horror: "The idea so possessed my mind, that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange that ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around" (172).

Create context for the material.

Don't just plop in quotes and expect the reader to understand. Explain, expand, or refute the quote. Remember, quotations should be used to support *your* ideas and points. Here's one simple, useful pattern: **Introduce** quote, **give** quote, **explain** quote.

Example 1

Introduce Dorianne Laux's "Girl in the Doorway" uses many metaphors to evoke a sense of change between the mother and daughter: **Give** "I stand at the dryer, listening/through the thin wall between us, her voice/rising and falling as she describes her new life" (3-5). **Explain** The "thin wall" is literal but also references their communication barrier; "rising and falling" is the sound of the girl's voice but also a reference to her tumultuous preteen emotions.

Example 2 (longer block quotation)

Introduce After watching the cottagers with pleasure, Frankenstein's creature has a startling moment of revelation and horror when he sees his own reflection for the first time:

Give I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers — their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity. (76)

Explain This literal moment of reflection is key in the creature's growing reflection of self: In comparing himself with humans, he sees himself not just as different but as "the monster that I am."

Also: Pay attention to proper format and grammar (See VU Writing Studio handout "Quotation Basics: Grammar, Punctuation, and Style"), and always, always credit your source in order to avoid plagiarism. Citation styles (e.g. MLA, APA, or Chicago) vary by discipline. Ask your professor if you are uncertain, and then check style guides for formats. (The above examples use MLA format.)