

Mastering Literary Analysis – Week 3

Using Quotations in Literary Analysis

First of all, what is a quote? "Quote" is a word we use in two related but different ways: Sometimes, we are only talking about repeating, word-for-word, what someone said. For example, I might quote my friend who said, "This is the greatest class I have ever taken." When we talk about literature, however, a quote is *any* faithfully excerpted portion of the text, NOT just what a character says. It is a common mistake for beginning literature students to think that "quote" *only* refers to what characters say. For example, these two excerpts from *Pride and Prejudice* are both quotes:

- 1) "The whole party were in hopes of a letter from Mr. Bennet the next morning, but the post came in without bringing a single line from him."
- 2) "Caroline is incapable of willfully deceiving any one; and all that I can hope in this case is, that she is deceived herself."

The first quote is an excerpt from the narration. The second quote is an excerpt from what a character (in this case Jane) says. Both are quotes.

When you quote the text, the quote should be brief and to the point. You should only use the portion that most directly and clearly proves the point you are trying to make. Quotes should be no longer than three lines of poetry or four lines (as measured by the book/page) of prose—and should often be quite a bit shorter. A longer quote is called a **block quote**, and you may only use block quotes by special permission of your tutor in this class. The reason for this is that students often use quotes to "pad" the length of their paragraphs/essays and long quotes are very rarely useful in their entirety to the argument. Remember that everything must serve the argument you are making. If you do think a block quote is appropriate to the task at hand, email your tutor immediately and he or she will approve or disapprove. For how to format a block quote, see the section "long quotations" on this Purdue OWL page:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_quotations.html

Contextualizing your quotations:

When you quote a part of the text, you need to give some context in order for your reader to recall the situation in which the quotation occurs. Context refers to where in the story or the poem the quotation comes from, that is, to what is happening in the story at the time of the quotation. The context you give should be related to the quotation. This context helps the reader understand the quotation better.

Context is NOT the line number, the page number, or the chapter number (this information is in the citation).

Good contextualization will tell the following:

- 1) When the quotation takes place in the story
- 2) If it is dialogue, it will tell you who is speaking and whom the speaker is addressing.

Example 1:

You want to quote the following:

"She could have added, 'A young man too, like *you*, whose very countenance may vouch for your being amiable.'"

This quotation is from *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth has only recently met Wickham and is quite taken with him. She is indignant on his behalf when he tells her Darcy has mistreated him, and these are her unspoken thoughts. Hence, a good introduction would be the following:

When Wickham tells her of Darcy's supposed mistreatment of him, she sympathizes with him and thinks to herself that he is "[a] young man too . . . whose very countenance may vouch for [his] being amiable" (55).

Nota bene: I changed a few things from the original quote and marked my changes in brackets. You may make very minor changes of this kind, but you must mark them in brackets. I also cut out a few words and marked that with an ellipsis. You only want to make very brief excisions.

Other things to note about quotations:

- The citation goes outside the quotation marks AND should have a space between the quotation mark and the parenthetical citation
- The end punctuation goes after the citation and NOT within the quotation marks. The only exceptions are when a question mark (?) or an exclamation mark (!) occurs in the quotation itself. Then you include the question mark or exclamation mark and also put end punctuation after the citation.

Here is another way I might have used the previous quote to show you how to handle dialogue:

When Elizabeth sympathizes indignantly with Wickham when he tells her the story of his supposed mistreatment, "She could have added, 'A young man too, like *you*, whose very countenance may vouch for your being amiable'" (55).

- When you quote dialogue, you must use two sets of quotation marks because you are reproducing what is in the text itself. If there are quotation marks within the text, you must reproduce them here. When you use more than one set of quotation marks, you alternate between double and single quotation marks.

Example 2:

You want to quote the following:

"She had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage."

This occurs when Elizabeth hears that Charlotte has accepted Mr. Collins' proposal. A good introduction might work as follows:

When Elizabeth hears that Charlotte has not only accepted but invited Mr. Collins' proposal, she thinks that "[s]he had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage" (87)

Three ways of punctuating the introduction of a quotation

Make sure you note what punctuation each needs.

There are three ways to integrate a quotation into a sentence. They are equally correct, though certain methods may be preferable—for style and for brevity—in certain situations.

1) Use a comma. This method is generally used when the speaker of the quotation is identified. In such cases, the comma usually follows a verb indicating speech or dialogue or sometimes even thought. (Ex. says, "...", states, "...", asks, "...", thought, "...").

Example: Speaking to Keller, Annie explains, "words can be her *eyes*, to everything in the world outside her, and inside too" (Gibson 92).

2) Integrate the quotation "seamlessly." This method requires that the quotation fit into the sentence naturally, almost as if the introduction and the quotation itself were spoken by the same voice. Often (but not always) a seamless integration follows the subordinating conjunction "that."

Example: Speaking about the importance of language to Helen, Annie explains that "words can be her *eyes*, to everything in the world outside her, and inside too" (Gibson 92).

3) Use a colon. A colon tells the reader that what follows is closely related to the preceding clause. Thus, you should indicate or summarize at least part of the content that follows a colon. A colon can only be used after an introduction which is also an independent clause, that is, one which is a complete sentence in itself.

Example: Speaking to Keller, Annie emphasizes the importance of language to Helen: "words can be her *eyes*, to everything in the world outside her, and inside too" (Gibson 92).

Summing it up: A worksheet for contextualizing a quotation, use as necessary:

For each quotation write the following:

- larger context:

- immediate context

- introductory phrase:

Then put it altogether in one sentence (or occasionally in more than one).