

## AQC – Assertion, Quotation, Commentary

When writing a literary analysis, it is essential to support your thesis statement with text from the work of literature you are discussing – this is called a direct quotation. When adding quotations to your writing, it is important to surround them with material that will help them make sense in the context of the paper, such as assertions, lead-ins, and commentary. If a quotation is simply plunked into the format of an expository paragraph, it will confuse the reader, and it will detract from the smoothness of your paper.

In short, for analysis writing, the following three requirements must be met:

- 1) An argumentative claim must be made (the **assertion**).
- 2) A **quotation** must be presented, and blended into your writing, that supports the claim.
- 3) **Commentary** must follow the quotation that explains how the textual evidence presents the claim.

Let's look at each individual portion of the **A/C-Q-C/E**

### **A – ASSERTION/CLAIM**

An assertion is a general statement of belief or judgment that can be supported with specific evidence and examples. Each assertion needs to be connected to the thesis statement of the paper. The assertion makes the reader aware of a claim you are making and about to prove in regard to the thesis statement. A good way to think of it is that the Assertion step tells the reader what the forthcoming quotation will prove.

Examples:

- One example of Melville's use of color imagery is in the description of the whale.
- Another example of Fitzgerald's theme of ignoring reality is his symbolic use of names.
- An example of Shakespeare's theme of contrasts in life is seen in the diction choices in Hamlet's "[t]o be or not to be" speech.

### **Q - QUOTATION**

Direct quotations from literature are the evidence you can use to support the assertion in your topic sentence, and ultimately your thesis. These can be pieces of narration, words that are spoken, a character's thoughts, etc. The power of your quotation will be determined by how well you select it and explain it. Avoid using extremely long quotations or dialogue between two characters that will be confusing to insert into your writing. Try to reduce the quotation to the most essential piece(s) of information. You can paraphrase parts of a conversation if necessary.

Ways to approach integrating quotation into your essay:

1. Roll the quote into your own sentence (embedding).
  - Ex: Furthermore, when Scout and Jem are walking home from the pageant, they hear a man "running toward [them] with no child's steps" (264).
2. Introduce the quote with a complete sentence—use a colon.
  - Ex: For example, Scout explains to her father why she pummeled Walter Cunningham in the schoolyard: "He made me start off on the wrong foot" (27).
3. Introduce someone speaking—use a comma.

- Ex: In addition, while spending Christmas at Finches Landing, Francis tells Scout, “Atticus is ruinin’ the family” (87).

## TIPS

1. If you leave out words or phrases in the middle of a quotation, use an ellipsis mark (. . .). Use brackets to insert changes in a quotation that will make it fit your sentence structure smoothly.
  - Example: Elisa becomes more interested when the peddler tells her of a “lady down the road [who] has got . . . nearly every kind of flower but no chrysanthemums” (492).
2. It is important for the reader to understand the situation/context in which the quotation occurs and who is speaking. Even if you assume your reader has read the material about which you are writing, in order for the flow of the paper to remain smooth, the quotation might need some kind of introduction beyond the assertion - this is called a **LEAD-IN**. After all, a normal person does not memorize a piece of literature after having read it only once. It is your job to remind your reader of the situation surrounding the quotation. So, when inserting quotations, be sure to include the **SPEAKER** (if applicable) and the **SITUATION**.
3. All quotations are not created equally. Choose carefully which words you quote—make sure they support your assertion and thesis statement.
4. Do **NOT** use a quotation as a topic sentence. Topic sentences are part of **YOUR** structure and should be your unique thoughts and wording.
5. Remember that a mere quotation does not show anything, prove anything, or make anything obvious or evident. You, as the writer, have that job. That’s where **COMMENTARY** comes in.

## C – COMMENTARY/EVIDENCE

Commentary is the most important and most difficult portion of support for many writers. In a literary analysis, it is the commentary that explains your thinking to the reader. You need to explain your reasoning as to why the selected quotations prove your assertion and therefore thesis statement. It should be evident to you why the quotation was selected, but your thought process needs to be communicated to the reader of your paper. This will often take more than a couple sentences.

One way to remember what your options are for commentary is to use the acronym SPIES:

SIGNIFICANCE, PURPOSE, IMPORTANCE, EFFECT, or SUGGESTION.

Using these trigger words should help you create meaningful commentary. Avoid simply paraphrasing the quotation or restating the assertion in your commentary. Explain your reasoning. Some words to consider using to begin commentary are the following:

proves	implies	indicates	demonstrates
testifies to	underscores	argues (that, for)	shows
supports	illustrates	confirms	establishes

i.e.: Through the use of nature imagery, the author demonstrates that . . .

# Effective Quote Integration

## **SHOULD I INCLUDE THIS QUOTE?**

Ask yourself:

1. Will it fit into your argument? Does it fit in where you're planning to include it? If so, then using the quote is justified.
2. Is it merely descriptive – that is, would it be better to just paraphrase what the writer is saying, rather than directly quoting? If that is the case, consider paraphrasing the author instead.

Once you've decided that the quote should be included, follow the "three-step" rule to integrate it into your paper.

## **THREE STEP QUOTATION STRATEGY**

### ***Step One: Introduce the quotation***

College provides a diversity of social, academic and athletic opportunities for students. This can be a powerful positive force, but it can also detract from students' abilities to manage their time. *As George W. Bush states, "I sometimes overdid it when I was at school, missing out on valuable academic opportunities. Fortunately, I buckled down in my senior year and managed to make a 'C' average and things have worked out fine since" (227).*

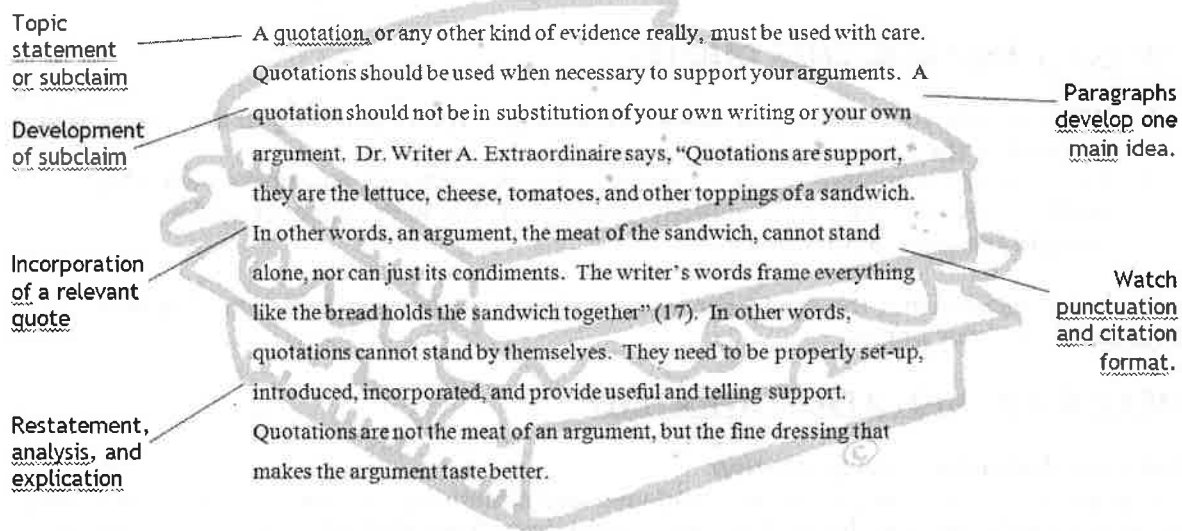
### ***Step Two: Explain what the author is arguing in the quotation. (The author should agree with how you sum up the quotation – this will help you establish credibility, by demonstrating that you do know what the author is saying even if you don't agree.)***

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### ***Step Three: State the implications of the quotation for your own argument. (What do you make of the author's argument?)***

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## THREE STEP QUOTATION INTEGRATION VISUAL



## EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVE QUOTING

**Remember that effective quoting:**

- **Adds Authority**
- **Adds evidence**
- **Adds a more sophisticated level of writing**

**Rate your partner's use of quoted evidence on a scale of 1-5 according to the following criteria.**

In-line (embedded) quotes and blocked quotes:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Does the author establish solid context and introduction for the quote? (i.e. does the author incorporate the quote well enough to make sure it does not seem dropped from nowhere?)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does the paper smoothly transition between the two voices (the voice of the author of the paper and the voice of the quoted author)?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you understand why he or she chose the quote? Does the writer take the time to explain the relation between the quote and his or her own argument or does the reader have to figure out how the quote is related?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you feel satisfied with the level of analysis AFTER the quote?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is there as much analysis as there is quoting? Or, is the quote followed up with a mere "like she said" remark? The paper-writer should be doing as much analytic work as the quoted author?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is each quote connected *directly* to either the point of the paragraph (check topic sentence) or the thesis of the paper?

Courtesy the Odegaard Writing & Research Center  
<http://www.depts.washington.edu/owrc>

Adapted from UW Expository Writing Program handout. Quotation Sandwich image courtesy Edward Chang.