Lead-ins, Quotes, and Commentary

When adding a quote or quotes to writing, it is important to surround them with material that will help them make sense in the context of the paper, such as lead-ins and commentary. If a quotation is simply plunked into the format of an expository paragraph, it will detract from a smooth flow.

LEAD-INS

In most instances, it is important for the reader to understand the situation/context in which the quote 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 quotes must carry some kind of introduction. 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 quote. So, when inserting quotes, be sure to include the **SPEAKER (if applicable)** and the **SITUATION**.

Examples:

- For example, after Scout pummels Walter Cunningham in the schoolyard, she says, ". . .
- In addition, while spending Christmas at Finches Landing, Francis tells Scout, ". . .
- Furthermore, when Scout and Jem are walking home from the pageant, ". . .

QUOTES

Direct quotes from literature are the evidence you can use to support the assertion in your major, 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 quote 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 quote to the most essential piece(s) of information. You can paraphrase parts of a conversation if necessary.

Ways to approach integrating quotes 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 quote, use an ellipsis mark. Use brackets to insert changes in a quote 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. Make sure the quote and lead-in are supported; always include commentary.
3. All quotations are not created equally. Choose carefully which words you quote—make sure they support your major.
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.

COMMENTARY

Commentary is difficult for many writers. 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 quote or restating the major support in your commentary.