

Effective Quoting in Analytical Writing

Providing textual evidence is essential to any analytical essay. Often, this comes in the form of direct quotes. While paraphrasing can be acceptable at times, you should aim to provide at least some direct quotes in each analytical paragraph. However, there are ways to make your use of quotes more effective.

- **Be selective with your quotes**

- Use the most appropriate piece of evidence. You will find multiple pieces of evidence for almost every point you wish to make. Choose one that is clear and concise.
- Use only what you need to evidence your point. Lengthy quotes are usually unnecessary. There's no rule that says you must quote entire sentences.
- If you do need a longer quote, say two or more sentences, these should go on a new line and be indented.
 - For example: Woodland's dramatic exposition grabs the reader's attention immediately with its horrifying and graphic detail:
It was over in a second. The cold steel slashed through warm flesh, and a body lay in the dirt of a dark back street.
- Transcribe quotes accurately.

- **Generally, use only the exact words from the text**

- In some instances, it is acceptable to alter quotes slightly as long as the original meaning is not altered. Typically, this is just to provide additional clarification.
- Any substitutions should be indicated by square brackets.
 - For example: "I knew him well, and I didn't care" can become "I knew [David] well, and I didn't care"
- Any omissions should be indicated through the use of an ellipsis (...) to indicate the missing words.
 - For example: "And later on, when I couldn't make any money, I stabbed him to death" can become "And later on ... I stabbed him to death"

- **Contextualise your evidence**

- You can't just "throw in" a quote. You need to provide some background as to where in the text it comes from, who — if anyone — is speaking and the circumstances surrounding the quote. You don't need too much detail, but a quick bit of groundwork will help your marker see the relevance of your quote.
- Furthermore, you need to lead into the piece of evidence with some words of your own, contextualising its function in your paragraph. This is known as embedding your quote.
 - For example: Woodland writes, "Only a few hours before he died, he told me he was going to go straight. Yeah, go to his Uncle's farm and start a new life. This quote shows..."
 - Embedded, this would read: Woodland reveals that the dead youth was intending to "go straight", by revealing that he was going to "go to his Uncle's farm and start a new life."

- **Explain your interpretation**
 - Never assume that your quote is self-explanatory. As you are no doubt aware, texts can result in multiple readings. Your marker might have a totally different view of the quote you have included. Therefore, ensure that you explain your interpretation clearly. Your quote must be explained: Why have you included it? What does it show?
 - For example: Woodland reveals the cheapness of life on the streets, when the narrator says, "And for a while I felt sorry, but that went like everything else after I scored a hit." The casual reference to the narrator's quickly passing sorrow reveals how little impact the death of this homeless youth had on even those around him, suggesting how little society cares for the marginalised.
 - Quotes rarely "prove" anything. Instead they imply, reveal, suggest, make evident, can be read as, demonstrate, indicate, challenge, influence or reinforce etc.

- **Deconstruct your quotes**
 - To be convincing, you should clearly analyse your quote, deconstructing it by considering the various elements of its construction.
 - For example: When the narrator dismisses the youth's death as "Just another junkie written off" and "Nothing new," the short syntax and blunt language highlight the lack of regard for this tragedy.
 - Use appropriate metalanguage. The terminology is there for a reason: it is concise, specific and technically correct.
 - Don't waste time defining such technical terms — your teacher knows them well enough! Instead, focus on applying this knowledge by explaining how they work in your example.

- **Support primary quotes with secondary evidence**
 - Ideally, a paragraph should include one significant 'showcase' quote; the main piece of evidence that supports your topic sentence. Secondary quotes — smaller phrases of only a couple of words — can also be used to strengthen your point.
 - For example: Woodland reveals the simplicity of the young man's dreams in revealing that he wanted to "go to his Uncle's farm and start a new life." A farm has connotations of a simple life, one characterised by hard work and a closeness to nature. Importantly, we imagine farm life to be healthy, a stark contrast to the character's drug-addled life on the streets. It is a place where he can heal, "go straight" and "forget about the streets."

Following these guidelines will help ensure you use evidence in ways that are meaningful and effective in supporting your argument.

"Nothing Special" by Brett Woodland is in:

- MacLeod, Doug (ed.). (1987). *Kissing the Toad and Other Stories*. Ringwood: Penguin.