

Incorporating Quotes into Your Paragraphs

The purpose of evidence in your paragraphs is obvious: can I back up my claims with support from the text? Just like you would be unwise to believe anyone who tells you anything is true, so too can the reader need to understand that you can prove with evidence that your theory (the claim) actually fits the facts (the text). Part of being convincing is the ability to back up your claims.

However, in order for the reader to understand your evidence, you have to present it in such a way that it makes sense. This is the **context**. For example, if I were in a courtroom, it is not enough to present a bloody knife as evidence in a murder trial. Its relevance (*Did the crime involve a stabbing? To whom does the knife belong?* etc.) and its context in terms of other evidence (*Where was it found? Is the width of the blade consistent with the wound?* etc.). In the same way, if you just drop a quote into a paragraph without introducing it or explaining its context, it makes no sense in terms of your argument and becomes confusing to the reader.

STEP ONE: Since the evidence usually follows a claim statement, most of the time you need some sort of **transition** to signal to the reader that you are introducing your evidence. Two good ones are *for example* and *for instance*. In a longer paragraph with multiple pieces of evidence, you generally want to alternate them so the writing doesn't feel like a formula. You can put the transition at the beginning of the sentence or after the first few words of the sentence (set off by commas). Here are two examples:

One conflict in Charles Perrault's re-telling of the Little Red Riding Hood story is that the little girl wants to visit her grandmother, while the wolf wants to consume her. **For example**, Little Red Riding Hood stops to talk to the predatory animal, not knowing it is "dangerous to stop and listen to wolves."

One conflict in Charles Perrault's re-telling of the Little Red Riding Hood story is that the little girl wants to visit her grandmother, while the wolf wants to consume her. Little Red Riding Hood, **for instance**, stops to talk to the predatory animal, not knowing it is "dangerous to stop and listen to wolves."

STEP TWO: Next you have to choose your evidence. Most of the time in this class, this will mean the incorporation of quotation. In fact, unless the directions say differently, assume that this is the case. Here your choice is down to whether you want to use an entire sentence or a snippet quote (a few critical words) that you integrate into your own sentence.

If you use complete sentences, cut down the quote to only the portion you need with ellipses [...]. Remember, though, cut down sentences still have to make grammatical sense. Keeping the same example as above, my evidence might look like:

One conflict in Charles Perrault's re-telling of the Little Red Riding Hood story is that the little girl wants to visit her grandmother, while the wolf wants to consume her. For example, Little Red Riding Hood stops to talk to the predatory animal. **However, as Charles Perrault writes, "The poor child [...] did not know that it was dangerous to stop and listen to wolves."**

The Thing in the Forest
By Bernard Capes

The other way is simply to use only the words you need. This is usually what I do when I write these paragraphs, since it reads less like a writing formula:

One conflict in Charles Perrault's re-telling of the Little Red Riding Hood story is that the little girl wants to visit her grandmother, while the wolf wants to consume her. For example, Little Red Riding Hood stops to talk to the predatory animal, not knowing it is **"dangerous to stop and listen to wolves."**

If you change a quote, indicate the change in brackets. This can be done because you need to change the tense of a verb so that the grammar makes sense (Example: *Since **"The poor child [...] [does] not know that it was dangerous to stop and listen to wolves,"** Little Red Riding Hood stops to talk to the predatory animal.*). Another reason to do this is if you want to change the form of a name so that the quote is easier to follow or it flows better in the sentence (Example: *Little Red Riding Hood stops to talk to the predatory animal. However, as Charles Perrault writes, **"[She] [...] did not know that it was dangerous to stop and listen to wolves."***)

STEP THREE: You've got to set up the quote. The goal should be to write in such a way that even if someone hasn't read the story or poem that you're writing about, they would still be able to follow your argument.

Look at my last example to see how this works. It makes zero sense to the reader to write:

One conflict in Charles Perrault's re-telling of the Little Red Riding Hood story is that the little girl wants to visit her grandmother, while the wolf wants to consume her. For example, ~~Little Red Riding Hood stops to talk to the predatory animal, not knowing it is~~ **"dangerous to stop and listen to wolves."**

or,

One conflict in Charles Perrault's re-telling of the Little Red Riding Hood story is that the little girl wants to visit her grandmother, while the wolf wants to consume her. For example, ~~Little Red Riding Hood stops to talk to the predatory animal. However, as Charles Perrault writes,~~ **"The poor child [...] did not know that it was dangerous to stop and listen to wolves."**

This might mean writing another sentence before you get to the evidence so that the reader understands what is going on in that part of the story or poem. This might just mean adding a few words before the quote. What it should always mean is that the reader understands: 1) Who is saying it (the author or the character); 2) What is happening at that point in the narrative; and 3) When it is happening.

If you're looking for a formula that works most of the time, try this:

For example/instance, when [something happens], [somebody-- either the author or a character] writes [if it's the author]/says [if it's a character], "[insert quote]."