



## Using Quotations Effectively

### Foundation Lesson – Student Resource

#### Quotations in Literary Analysis

A good way to introduce a quotation is to provide the reader with the name of the speaker and the situation in which the quotation takes place.

Meg has a tendency to jump to conclusions and to assume the worst about anything that happens. *When she realizes that her father has rescued her from “It,” the giant evil brain, but that he is powerless to retrieve her brother, Charles Wallace, from the planet of Camazotz, she lashes out at him in despair, complaining bitterly, ““You don’t even know where we are!”” She continues, ““We’ll never see mother or the twins again! We don’t know where earth is! Or even where Camazotz is! We’re lost out in space!”” (L’Engle, 172). With this statement, Meg acknowledges her beloved father’s imperfections and takes a step toward adulthood by realizing that in some situations, even parents are not all-powerful.*

In the example, the writer is examining Meg’s character in *A Wrinkle in Time* and illustrating one of her personal qualities by including a quotation, folded into a sentence of the writer’s own devising. The writer is considerate of the reader by setting the quotation in its proper context and identifying its speaker. When two quotations are included, they are linked by a transitional phrase.

The writer also comments on the quotation, analyzing it, revealing why it was included, and relating it to the overall topic of Meg’s character. The italicized parts of the paragraph above illustrate both the introduction to the quotation and the commentary the writer made after it.

The writing strategy, then, is this:

**Assertion** Meg has a tendency to jump to conclusions and to assume the worst about anything that happens.

**Introduction to the quotation (speaker and situation)** *When she realizes that her father has rescued her from “It,” the giant evil brain, but that he is powerless to retrieve her brother, Charles Wallace, from the planet of Camazotz, she lashes out at him in despair, complaining bitterly,*

**Quotation that proves or backs up the assertion** “You don’t even know where we are!”

**Transitional phrase to second question** *She continues,*

**Second quotation that proves or backs up the assertion** “We’ll never see mother or the twins again! We don’t know where earth is! Or even where Camazotz is! We’re lost out in space!”



**Commentary on the quotation** With this statement, Meg acknowledges her beloved father’s imperfections and takes a step toward adulthood by realizing that in some situations, even parents are not all-powerful.

### Quotations as Evidence in an Argument

In another kind of writing situation, the author might want to use quotations from a book, an article, or a person as evidence for an argument, to illustrate an idea, or as a reinforcement of the writer’s own point of view. In this case, speaker and situation are still a relevant way to introduce the quotation.

For example, in an editorial article about cloning, perhaps the feature writer would like to include a quotation from a reputable, well-known scientist to reinforce the thesis of the article. In this case, the writer must again courteously make the reader aware of who the speaker is and of the circumstances surrounding the quotation.

All the media hype about cloning has obscured the scientific reasons for the technique and sensationalized the topic rather than debated it logically. *The noted cloning experts from Jones University, Clark and Burns, commented on the matter in their speech at Warren Medical Center last May. Their point of view was, “We won’t know what applications of this technology are possible until people calm down and examine the issue logically” (Jordan 45). Their balanced, rational statements have done much to tone down the emotional storm caused in their university by experimentation with cell reproduction.*

Again, then, the pattern is:

**Assertion**

**Introduction** to the quotation

**Quotation** that proves or illustrates the assertion

**Documentation** of the quotation’s source

**Commentary** on the quotation

Useful verbs in writing this kind of an introduction include

advocates	argues	asserts
believes	claims	denies
emphasizes	insists	notes
points out	proposes	suggests
observes that	comments	maintains that
reports		

Three other points about using quotations are important to understand:

- brackets
- “emphasis-added” italics
- ellipses

**Brackets**

If the writer of the piece wants to insert text not in the original quote, he or she can do so using brackets, which show that the speaker or writer of the quotation did not say or write the bracketed text. Sometimes this technique is useful if the verb tense of the quotation does not agree with that of the writing piece; sometimes it is useful when the writer wants to use only a fragment of the quotation and the meaning needs clarification.

For example, in the quote about cloning, what if the writer wanted to use only part of the quotation?

When Clark and Burns ask those concerned about the issue to “calm down and examine [the problem],” their diction serves as a moderating force in the angry debate about cloning.

**Emphasis-Added Italics**

In addition, if the writer wanted to emphasize something inside the quote, he or she could use italics to do so, but must add the phrase “emphasis added” to clarify the fact that the italics were not in the original passage.

When Clark and Burns ask those concerned about the issue to “*calm down* and examine” (emphasis added) the issues involved in cloning, their diction serves as a moderating force in the angry debate between proponents and opponents.

**Ellipses**

Finally, if the writer wants to leave out part of the quotation, he or she will want to insert ellipses (...) to show that some text has been omitted. For example:

The noted cloning experts from Jones University, Clark and Burns, commented on the matter in their speech at Warren Medical Center last May. When asked how soon applications would be found for the new technology, they replied, “We won’t know... until people calm down and examine the issue logically.”



## Using Quotations Effectively Foundation Lesson

### Student Exercise (Literary Analysis)

Using a text of your choice, write about an idea you have about one of the characters, using the structure outlined above.

- **Assertion**
- **Introduction** to the quotation
- **Quotation** (in the same sentence as the introduction)
- **Documentation** of the source (in parentheses after the quotation)
- **Commentary** on the quotation

### Student Exercise (Argument)

Using a weekly news magazine such as *Time* or *Newsweek*, find a quotation that supports a view you hold about politics, the environment, human rights, or another aspect of life. Write about your view and illustrate or support it through the use of a quotation, using the format you have been practicing.

- **Assertion**
- **Introduction** to the quotation
- **Quotation** (in the same sentence as the introduction)
- **Documentation** of the source (in parentheses after the quotation)
- **Commentary** on the quotation

Develop this piece of a paragraph into a full-blown, substantial paragraph that argues your assertion.

### Student Exercise (Magazine Article)

After interviewing a friend, write a profile of him or her suitable for a *People Magazine* article. Use several quotations from the interview, following the format for effective use of quotes.

- **Assertion**
- **Introduction** to the quotation
- **Quotation** (in the same sentence)
- **Source** of the quotation (can be given in the introduction to the quote or in parentheses after the quotation)
- **Commentary** on the quotation