

Revising a Paragraph That Deals With a Quote

- Homework Assignment for the ALP students: Write a paragraph that explains one idea about justice that you find interesting in "Letter From A Birmingham Jail." Make sure you use at least one quote.
- This is a worksheet that might help the students revise that paragraph. The goal is twofold: to help the students understand how paragraphs like this can be constructed, and to give them a head start on the 101 paper.

Here are some things that you might want to think about including in a paragraph that deals with a quotation from a text.

1. How do you introduce the quote?
2. Is the quote itself properly formatted?
 - Is it in quotation marks?
 - Are you only using as much of the quote as you need to? (Don't use a whole sentence if you only need a word!)
3. Is your writing flowing smoothly into the language of the quote.
4. Have you cited the quote? (Do this at the end of the sentence, even if your writing continues after the quoted material ends.)
5. Do you explain, in your own words, what the quote means? (Don't just assume that the reader of your paper understands the quote the way you do!)
6. How do you connect the quote, and your explanation of it, to the thesis of your paper? (Remember that this paragraph is ultimately going to be part of a longer paper.)

The goal of this exercise **is not** to give you a set of instructions or a blueprint. Instead, it is to give you ways to think about improving your paragraph construction. Take the next few minutes and look at the ideas below. As you do, find the places in your own paper where you are already doing these things, or where you might consider revising to add them.

1. **Introduce the quote.** The point here is to let the reader know what's coming. Introductions of quotes sometimes look like these:

In his essay "What You Don't Know Makes You Nervous," Daniel Gilbert writes that

or

One example the author uses in the book is of a

or

Here, Gilbert makes an important point:

2. **Put the quote in quotation marks. Only use as much of the quote as you need to.**

Remember that you have to make it clear to the reader that the quote comes from someone else, by putting it in quotation marks. It's also a lot easier not to quote complete sentences unless you need to.

In his essay "What You Don't Know Makes You Nervous," Daniel Gilbert writes that our "innocent belief that money buys happiness was entirely correct," and I agree with him.

or

Here, Gilbert makes an important point: "the simple things in life" are always "worth having."

Notice that Gilbert's entire sentences are not quoted. For example, Gilbert's entire sentence in the first example is "Americans had a great deal more to fear than that, and their innocent belief that money buys happiness was entirely correct." In these examples, though, we only wanted to talk about the part that relates to money buying happiness or about the simple things in life. Therefore, the underlined part is the only part we quoted.

3. Make sure your language flows smoothly into the language of the quote.

If you look at each of the above examples, you will notice that the words at the beginning of the sentence, like *Daniel Gilbert writes that our* flow smoothly, and without grammatical mistakes, into the language of the quote itself, "innocent belief that money buys happiness was entirely correct" We can test this by removing the quotation marks from the example:

In his essay *What You Don't Know Makes You Nervous*, Daniel Gilbert writes that our innocent belief that money buys happiness was entirely correct, and I agree with him.

This is a grammatically correct sentence. Putting the quotation marks back in, so that it is clear which part of the language is ours and which part is the author's, doesn't change that.

In his essay "What You Don't Know Makes You Nervous," Daniel Gilbert writes that our "innocent belief that money buys happiness was entirely correct," and I agree with him.

4. Cite the quote at the end of the sentence, even if your writing continues after the quote ends.

The information we need here is the author's last name, if we don't know it from the paper already, and the page number on which the quote appears. These go in parenthesis at the end of the sentence. **Note: the period always comes at the very end.**

Next, the author argues that our "innocent belief that money buys happiness was entirely correct," which is his way of saying that there is something accurate in the way that we connect income and well being (Gilbert 79).

In his essay "What You Don't Know Makes You Nervous," Daniel Gilbert writes that our "innocent belief that money buys happiness was entirely correct," and I agree with him (79).
- because we mentioned Gilbert's name in the introduction to the quote, all we needed at the end was the page number. The citation always goes at the very end of the sentence.

5. Explain, in your own words, what the quote means.

This means that after you get done citing the quote, you have to tell us what you think it means. This is important, because the reader has to be clear about why you are quoting this, and how it relates to your argument. Remember that we don't all have the same interpretation of a reading.

In his essay "What You Don't Know Makes You Nervous," Daniel Gilbert writes that our "innocent belief that money buys happiness was entirely correct" and I agree with him (79). His point is that people during the Depression were right to be afraid that not having money would make them unhappy. He also wants to extend this argument to contemporary America, and claim that the same is true of us today. I agree because...

6. Connect the quote, and your explanation of it, to your thesis.

Finally, remember that you will rarely be asked to write a paragraph that stands alone, without being connected to anything. The point of this worksheet is to help you prepare for our English 101 paper. The prompt for that paper asks you to explain what you think is important about King's theory of justice; it also asks you to think what King might make of a contemporary issue of social justice. Looking back over your paragraph, can you envision a way that it could fit in to your ideas about either of these things? Work on expanding the paragraph to connect it to a larger idea you have.