

Embedding Quotations: A Handy Guide for Students and Teachers

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Overview: Often, getting high school students to embed quotes -- that is, to incorporate quoted text into their own sentences smoothly and fluidly --- can be a considerable challenge leading to run-ons, choppy composition, and general frustration. This lesson is designed to help students and teachers understand the purpose of incorporating quotes and give students a consistent pattern they can use until embedding quotes becomes more natural.

Grades: 9-12

Time: Varies, depending on the degree to which a teacher wants to emphasize this lesson. My recommendation is to introduce this material relatively early in the year, provide students practice, and return to specific issues as needed.

Embedding Quotations - FOR STUDENTS

Embedding quotations smoothly into a sentence is a basic skill you will need to master before college. The most common student errors are failure to embed, partial embedding, choppy integration of the quotation, and run-ons.

Common Problem #1: Failure to Embed

In a quotation that has not been embedded at all, the quotation has been “dragged-and-dropped” into the text with little or no relationship between the quotation and the sentences that precede or follow it.

- **Example**
- Shakespeare’s character Hamlet is very indecisive. “To be or not to be” (III.i). This shows he is indecisive.
- **Commentary about this sentence.**
- Notice that the quotation has just been dropped into the student’s work and could easily be pulled out without disrupting the sentences before or after? That’s what is meant by “failure to embed.” When a quote is embedded, it’s woven into the sentence -- you can’t just remove it without messing up the rest of the sentence.

Common Problem #2: Partially Embedded

In a partially-embedded quotation, the quotation has some kind of introduction or speech tag such as “X says,” or “X is saying,” but usually, the student ends the sentence with the quotation and does not continue the thought.

- **Example**
- Shakespeare’s character Hamlet is very indecisive, saying, “To be or not to be” (III.i). This shows he is indecisive.

Common Problem #3: Choppy Integration

With choppy integration, the sentence does not make sense as a grammatical unit when read out loud. The student may not understand that the quotation needs to flow grammatically.

- **Examples**
- Shakespeare's character Hamlet "to be or not to be" is very indecisive.
- Shakespeare's character Hamlet says he will "I will delve one yard below their mines," this shows how he will win.
- Shakespeare's character Hamlet says that he is a "rogue and peasant slave am I."

- **Commentary**
- Notice how each one, when read out loud, does not make grammatical sense? There will be more information about fixing this problem below, but for now, just note that when you read it out loud, the quoted information doesn't fit smoothly into the sentence -- it reads very choppily, with some information repeated and without an easy flow from one idea to the other.

Common Problem #4: Run-Ons

Run-ons, CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, are NOT "sentences that run on and on." A run-on actually is a sentence with insufficient punctuation or transitions from clause to clause. Often, students run into a problem with embedded quotes because they don't realize the quoted material has to become part of the sentence and usually needs a transition or phrase to link it with the rest of the sentence.

Examples. NOTE: In each example, the area in which the run-on occurs has been bolded and underlined.

- Shakespeare's character Macbeth is not sure if he should allow his fate to happen, saying, "If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me without my stir" (Liii. 43-44), **this shows** he is indecisive.
- In the poem, the speaker explains that he "wandered lonely as a cloud" (45) **he is not fixed** to any place.

The Helpful Quick Fix

In order to solve all of these problems, you need a quick fix. This quick fix is a pretty basic sentence pattern you can use to set up your quotations correctly. Once you get used to writing sentences this way, you can adapt the pattern to your own needs. Here's the basic pattern:

The "In Other Words" Quote Sandwich

- Speech tag and context, "the author's words," or in other words, your words.

How the “In Other Words” Quote Sandwich Works

Step One: The Speech Tag and Context

In the quote sandwich, your words are the “bread,” the author’s words are the meat (or if you’re a vegetarian, the yummy veggie filling), and your concluding words are the other piece of bread.

In a quote sandwich, you set up a brief introduction to the quote, usually by giving us a speech tag -- a short phrase telling us who’s speaking and what they’re doing. In the examples below, the speech tags are bolded and underlined.

Examples

- **Hamlet asks** in the beginning of act three, “What is a pterodactyl doing in the middle of a Shakespearean play?”
- After this realization, **Gertrude replies**, “Perhaps the pterodactyl is a gift from the French ambassador.”

Here are some basic words you can almost always use for your speech tags.

- States Insists Asks
- Replies Remarks Suggests
- Observes Argues Points out

Context

Notice how you can also give the reader information about WHERE in the text or WHY the character speaks? Here are those sentences again, but this time with the context -- that info about who, what, where, when, why -- underlined and bolded.

- Hamlet asks **in the beginning of act three**, “What is a pterodactyl doing in the middle of a Shakespearean play?”
- **After this realization**, Gertrude replies, “Perhaps the pterodactyl is a gift from the French ambassador.”

Step Two: Add the Author’s Words

Here’s an important tip: KISS. Keep It Super-Short. Your quotations don’t have to be long, and in fact, they probably shouldn’t be. (After all, your teacher’s read the work before. They don’t have to read it again in your paper, right?) Generally, remember the lucky number 7: No more than about 7 words at a time. If you need to shorten a quote by taking out words from the middle, put ellipses (the little dots) where you cut out a word. Make sure you don’t massively change the meaning of the original idea. (In other words, if someone said, “You cannot have chocolate,” it’s dishonest to quote it as “You can...have chocolate.” See?)

Examples:

- Brendon Urie begins his song by stating, “This is...for the fallen ones.”
 - The children’s novel *Charlotte’s Web* opens with Fern’s grim question, “Where’s Papa going with that ax?”
 - By the end of Shakespeare’s tragedy, Ophelia observes that the unexpected arrival of the pterodactyl “entirely changed everything.”
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Step Three: Or In Other Words

It’s at this point -- right after the quotation -- that many students struggle and end up writing a run-on. This step will fix that problem every time.

Here’s the solution: , or in other words,

Immediately after the quotation, put a comma, add the phrase “or in other words,” and then restate what your author just said. Remember that commas go *INSIDE* the quote marks, not outside. I’ve made the commas relatively huge in the examples below so you can see them.

Examples:

- Shakespeare’s character Macbeth is not sure if he should allow his fate to happen, saying, “If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me without my stir,” **or in other words,** he thinks he might be able to sit back and take a “whatever will be, will be” approach to his future.
- In the poem, the speaker explains that he “wandered lonely as a cloud,” **or in other words,** he is not fixed to any place.

Why this works:

For one, the phrase allows you to continue the sentence and avoid a run-on. The word “or” (because it’s a conjunction), conjoins the two halves of the sentence. Moreover, the “or in other words” allows you to clarify the meaning of a complicated idea to your reader (and yourself) and sets up your reader for a more in-depth close reading of the words later on.

Student Exercise on Next Page

Student Exercise: Embedding Quotations - Now You Try!

For each of the following quotations, provide a speech tag and context, the author's words, the phrase "or in other words" and then your own restatement. The first one is done as an example.

The "In Other Words" Quote Sandwich

- Speech tag and context, "the author's words," or in other words, "your words."

Sentence One (Example)

- **Context:** The beginning of the movie *Star Wars*
- **Quote:** Help me, Obi-Wan. You're my only hope.
- **Speaker:** Princess Leia

Your sentence should look like this:

In the beginning of the movie *Star Wars*, Princess Leia begs, "Help me, Obi-Wan. You're my only hope," or in other words, she desperately needs his assistance.

Sentence Two:

- **Context:** At a key point in the movie *Frozen*
- **Quote:** Do you want to build a snowman?
- **Speaker:** Elsa to her sister Anna, who has locked herself behind a door.

Sentence Three

- **Context:** During the song "House of Gold"
- **Quote:** I will make you queen of everything you see.
- **Speaker:** Tyler Joseph, the lead singer of Twenty One Pilots, speaking to his mother

Sentence Four

- **Context:** A voice-over moment in the television show *iZombie*.
- **Quote:** I chose not to tell my fiance that I was a zombie.
- **Speaker:** The main character Liv, confessing to the audience in a voice-over that she is concealing her zombie identity.

Sentence Five

- **Context:** The theme song from *Spongebob Squarepants*
- **Quote:** Who lives in a pineapple under the sea?
- **Speaker:** The singer of the theme song to the children's show *Spongebob Squarepants*, asking about Spongebob's place of residence.