

Essay Writing: Content and Quote Incorporation

In an essay, you combine a number of skills. Not only are you showing your ability to analyze, you are also proving you know how to organize your ideas. Keep the following in mind as you create your essay:

INTRODUCTION

- › Funnel your introduction – move from general to specific
- › General statement: introduces the main idea of your paper / not a vague or improvable statement (i.e. *authors use literary devices to . . . or characters develop personalities through. . . .*)
- › Background information: book and author; necessary historical information, necessary character, setting, and / or plot information; possible definition (ask yourself: what does my reader need to know before I get specific in my body paragraphs?)
- › Thesis statement / preview of paragraph topics – remember to make your thesis clear and specific so there's no vague language
- › Reminder: always argue from the thesis – you should not be trying to prove in your body paragraphs something you never introduced or hypothesized in your introduction

BODY PARAGRAPHS / CONTENT

- › Each body paragraph needs to include:
 - › Topic sentence (if not the first body paragraph, this sentence should transition from previous paragraph)
 - › One to two examples supporting topic sentence
 - › Quote from primary source supporting EACH example
 - › Quote from secondary source supporting at least one example
 - › Closing sentence that does *not* mention the topic of the next paragraph – transitions should be at the start of a paragraph, not the end
- › Back your arguments with quotes and logically argued reasoning
- › Avoid superficial arguments that do nothing more than state an idea in a sentence or two
- › Plot summary is not necessary beyond one or two sentences – plot review is only acceptable when it is directly tied to demonstrating a valid point
- › Use the text to make your arguments!

CONCLUSION PARAGRAPH

- › Begin by rewording your thesis; this lets the reader know you are concluding your argument. It's best if you clearly and smoothly transition from the previous paragraph. This is not easy and requires revision.
- › Remind your readers of your best examples that cover the topic as a whole; this is important because the conclusion is your final say.
- › The final sentence should be a thought provoking statement (*not* a question) that relates to the main idea of your paper. It's really difficult not to make this repetitive.

TRANSITIONS

- › Your transitions should be advanced, not repetitive. You may use transitional words and phrases, but do not overuse them.
- › Do not mention the subject of the next paragraph in the closing sentence of the preceding paragraph; a closing sentence should close a paragraph and not open up a new topic – that's what topic sentences are for.

- › “first, second, third/ lastly” were great transitions freshman year – strive for something more advanced now
 - be repeating an idea from one paragraph to the next, you can smoothly transition
 - EX: Therefore, if Oedipus was truly to escape his fate, he had to turn down the other road at the intersection.
 - But choosing a path from the intersection was a simple task compared to...

QUOTE INCORPORATION

- › Use MLA style or refer to English Department Handbook for specifics
- › Ask me or Mr. Sprehe if you are confused about anything
- › Remember to always connect your quotes/ cited material to your discussion; don't throw it into a paragraph or let it hang there attached to nothing!
- › All quotes/ excerpts need an introduction of some sort (who said it, in what context was it said, etc)
- › Include both introduction and explanation for each quote – use a layered sandwich approach: tell us what to expect, tell us the quote, then explain why the quote is the best quote to prove the thesis
- › Make sure to stress the importance of the quote – but don't just tell the reader what the quote means; your reader is smart enough to know what a quote says, but you need to tell the reader why the quote is so important by analyzing the line in relationship to your argument(s)

Example of good quote incorporation / solid body paragraph:

- › Primary source = Wuthering Heights
- › Paragraph topic = using Cathy's choice of husband as a source for characterization.

Primary source quote:

“My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath – a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff” (Bronte 84).

Secondary source quote:

“Cathy cannot exist without him, but a meaningful relationship is not possible, because Cathy sees Heathcliff only as a reflection of herself” (Laban n.p.).

This example is correct:

Catherine's choice to marry Linton increases the reader's understanding of her character. When faced with the decision to marry Linton, she recognizes her love for each man is different. Catherine knows that her “love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware as winter changes the trees” (Bronte 84). However, she says her “love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath – a source of little visible delight, but necessary” (Bronte 84). Her relationship with Linton gives her immediate gratification like “the foliage in the woods” would give to the casual observer. Linton can offer her this gratification because of his money. He can afford to offer the material necessities that she deems important. Their relationship would appear beautiful and happy to any who might observe them. On the other hand, Heathcliff could provide her with “little visible delight.” Her relationship with Heathcliff, although strong like “the eternal rocks beneath,” rarely gives her pleasure because of his inability to provide her with material comforts. She knows he would not be able to create the same image that Linton has the means to

construct. Her connection with Heathcliff is stronger; however, this makes no difference to her. She is too superficial to choose Heathcliff over Linton.

Money was not the only reason for her decision. She also realizes that another source of tension in her relationship with Heathcliff is that the two are very much alike. She tells her housekeeper that she is Heathcliff (Bronte 84); in other words, they share the same qualities. Cathy understands that she “cannot exist without [Heathcliff], but a meaningful relationship is not possible, because Cathy sees Heathcliff only as a reflection of herself” (Laban n.p.). Believing that a meaningful relationship with Heathcliff is not possible, she marries Linton. Her relationship with Heathcliff would be much more difficult to maintain because both are passionate and tend to overreact. Her choice of the simpler relationship proves she would rather live comfortably than risk a challenge. Although a relationship with Heathcliff might be more fulfilling, she would rather take the easier path.

This example is incorrect:

Catherine’s choice to marry Linton increases the reader’s understanding of her character. Catherine says, “my love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I’m well aware as winter changes the trees.” (Bronte, 84) “My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath – a source of little visible delight, but necessary” (Bronte 84). She tells her housekeeper, “I *am* Heathcliff.” (Bronte, 84) When Cathy and her housekeeper are in the kitchen, Cathy tells her housekeeper that she is Heathcliff; in other words, they have similar qualities. Thomas Laban agrees saying, “Cathy cannot exist without [Heathcliff], but a meaningful relationship is not possible, because Cathy sees Heathcliff only as a reflection of herself.” (3) Because Cathy realizes that a meaningful relationship with Heathcliff is not possible, she marries Linton. Even in her comparison, she admits her love for Heathcliff is stronger like “the eternal rocks beneath” but that her love for Linton, although temporary, is beautiful like, “the foliage in the woods.” Linton can offer her money, but Heathcliff cannot. Her choosing Linton for this reason shows she is superficial. She also knows that she cannot live with Heathcliff because they are too much alike.

OTHER REMINDERS

1. no second or first person
2. no questions
3. proofread
4. use present tense
5. double check subject / verb agreement and pronoun agreement
6. have someone else proofread it
7. watch out for vague pronouns
8. hit spell check – you’re laughing, but you’d be surprised
9. format MLA: title, page numbers, page layout, etc.
10. have your dog proofread it; birds tend to be repetitive and cats will just lay on it (but only if you’re trying to read it)
11. MAKE USE OF YOUR RESOURCES: technology (Inspiration, Writers’ Workbench, etc.), the Writing Center, Mr. Sprehe, me, a former English teacher – the list goes on and on.