

LUC WRITING CENTER – “CHOOSING AND EXPLAINING QUOTES”

Why **quote** in an essay? Simply put, quoting a text or other source allows your reader to examine the original statement for themselves and see if your argument is right regarding its interpretation. You gain the trust of your reader if their assessment of the quote agrees with your own. *But what quotes are best for you to use?* Let’s say you’ve read a book and could write a very thorough summary of what the book is about. What passages in the book helped you understand the deeper message of the book or stood out to you as relevant to your argument? *Remember that along with facts, quotes are the “proof” of your essay’s argument.*

For instance, suppose you’re writing an essay about Jonathan Swift’s 1726 novel *Gulliver’s Travels*. Here is your thesis: **“Gulliver’s Travels suggests that a greater knowledge of other cultures, systems, and people through foreign exposure and travel creates dissatisfaction with one’s own country and family.”** To support this thesis, you need to provide proof of such dissatisfaction existing in the novel. The following quote might help support your argument. It describes Gulliver’s return from his voyage to the Houyhnhnms and arrival at his house in Redriff, England:

“My Wife and Family received me with great Surprize and Joy, because they concluded me certainly dead; but I must confess that the Sight of them filled me only with Hatred, Disgust and Contempt; and the more, by reflecting on the near Alliance I had to them” (254).

This quote, and the passage that follows it, captures the distancing effect of time and acclimation to other cultures and even creatures, that you see to be causing alienation between Gulliver and his family. You understand how this quote functions as proof, but you need to **walk your reader through the process of comprehending the quote, as demonstrated in the paragraph below:**

So completely has Gulliver adopted the wise, intellectual behaviors of the horse-like Houyhnhnms encountered on his last journey, that he completely rejects fellow humans for their sensuality and physicality and lofty social attitudes, which remind him of the human-like Yahoo’s greed and animalistic behavior observed on the same island. Describing his return home to Redriff, he states, **“My Wife and Family received me with great Surprize and Joy, because they concluded me certainly dead; but I must confess that the Sight of them filled me only with Hatred, Disgust and Contempt; and the more, by reflecting on the near Alliance I had to them” (254).** Though Gulliver’s family happily greets their lost husband and father, Gulliver is unable to reciprocate their affection and literally detests them. Moreover, his inability to bring himself to touch or live with them as a member of the same species represents the breakdown of the family unit in which Gulliver finds himself permanently trapped in his native, now depressingly alien England.

See how this paragraph allows you to introduce, quote, and explain a quote? Your choice of quote will support your argument best when it is explicitly relevant to your thesis and thoroughly explained to your reader.

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