**Embedding ‘Quotations’ in your Writing**

One of the most confusing aspects of writing essays is embedding quotes properly. Many people have no idea what embedding really means – and others have an idea but struggle to embed quotes properly. Essays with poorly embedded quotes are often difficult to read through; a poorly embedded quote can interrupt the flow of thought in an essay and confuse both graders and readers. However, embedding quotes is not difficult when you keep the following in mind:

1. **Don’t pull out a whole quote – use small segments of it.**

The rule of thumb is to never quote more than four words at a time. Obviously, this can be difficult, but the key to embedding quotes is to include the quote while still making your writing sound natural. When you use gigantic chunks of quotes, it can make your essay sound much more choppy and unnatural than it would if you embedded the quote properly.

Let’s say that you wanted to quote Theodore Roosevelt when he said, “He has no more backbone than a chocolate éclair” in reference to William McKinley. If you wanted to embed that quote into a sentence, you wouldn’t use the whole quote – you would use the most relevant segment of it. Instead of writing this:

Theodore Roosevelt thought he wasn’t assertive enough and said “he has no more backbone than a chocolate éclair”.

You might say instead:

Theodore Roosevelt felt that he lacked assertiveness, and once compared McKinley’s backbone to that of a “chocolate éclair”.

The easiest key to using small segments of a quote isseeing how much of a quote you need to use for it to still make sense. This is really a skill that gets better with practice, but keep in mind that you don’t need to quote ‘empty words’ – words like “the” and “a”.

1. **Quotes are meant to be evidence.**

This means that, while they provide support for your argument, they do not form it. This is important to keep in mind – quotes are kind of like the structural support for a house. Without them, your essay is baseless, but you don’t have a house just because you have the support built. This means that quotes must also be used somewhat sparingly – if you use a quote (especially in an English essay), you must expand upon it to some degree. Don’t throw out quotes and then move on – since they are meant to provide support, you must explain why the quote you just used supports your argument.

1. **Don’t make it sound forced.**

Read a sentence back to yourself a few times before you actually write it down. Does it sound natural? Does the quote flow well with the rest of the statement? If not, you need to re-work your embedding of the quote. Keep in mind that you don’t need to quote a phrase all at once; you can use parts of it throughout a sentence as well. Take this example:

Roosevelt often disagreed with him, saying that “[McKinley]” had the “backbone of a chocolate éclair”.

Though both phrases quoted in that sentence came from the same quote, they were broken up in my essay for clarity – and it is perfectly fine to do so in your own as well. Also notice that the “empty words” from Roosevelt’s statement are not quoted – this is often a personal decision, but can occasionally make an essay read more smoothly even though you are essentially saying the same thing as the quote.

1. **It’s okay to change tenses in a quote.**

If the reason your quote doesn’t flow with the rest of your paper is because it is written in a different tense to the rest of your paper, by all means change the tense! Sometimes, the content of quotes can also be unclear or sound wrong in a sentence.

You can fix this in the quote itself as long as you:

a) Don’t change the overall meaning of the quote

b) Indicate that you made a change.

Have you ever been reading an interview in a newspaper or magazine article and noticed that some words had brackets around them? When there are brackets around a word, it means that an author has changed the word in the quote for clarity*.*

Let’s say, for example, you are writing an essay about Leroy, who is very fond of unicorns. You also have a statement that someone said directly to Leroy that you want to use in your essay: “You really like unicorns.” However, this wouldn’t flow well in a sentence in your essay! You could write this:

Leroy adores unicorns and draws them on all of his papers; one friend even says that he “really like unicorns”.

But it sounds incorrect because of the tense confusion. You could change the sentence in your paper to one where the quote you’re using makes sense, but in many cases this is very difficult and oftentimes makes the sentence harder to read. However, there is a simple way to get around this – change the tense in the quote, so that the sentence now reads likes so:

Leroy adores unicorns and draws them on all of his papers; one friend even says that he “really [likes] unicorns”.

Notice that this does not change the meaning of the quote in any way – but it makes it readable within your paper. This can also be done to make quotes more clear – for example, if a quote refers to a “he” or “it” that may not be obvious to a reader in your essay. Using the same quote about Leroy from above, you could write a sentence like this:

Leroy even occasionally wears a unicorn horn when at home. One friend asserts that “you really like unicorns”.

This quote makes no sense, because it makes it seem like the person that you are quoting is asserting that youlike unicorns. However, with a little change, the sentence makes much more sense.

Leroy even occasionally wears a unicorn horn when at home. One friend asserts that “[Leroy] really [likes] unicorns”.

1. **Learn quotes that apply to many topics.**

This works especially well for timed English papers, where you will either not have access to a book from which to pull quotes. Keep in mind that the quotes you learn should apply to many topics so that you can use them in many places – for English papers, this usually means quotes that apply to themes or characterisation (or both). The more specific the quotes you learn, the less useful they will be to you – and the less you will be able to apply them to an essay.