

Embedding Quotations: The Marriage of Claim and Evidence

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Four key ideas regarding the embedding of quotations:

- Quotations should serve primarily as evidence for interpretive claims.
- Quotations generally should be kept short.
- Quotations should be situated such that the scene and speaker are identified.
- Quotations should not be isolated; instead they should be embedded grammatically within claim-making sentences.

If you want to use a complete, apparently self-explanatory sentence as textual evidence or background for a point you have made, at the very least connect that quotation to the claim using a colon. This should be a last resort, however. In most cases, you should build an interpretive nest for your evidential quotations. Clarify as much as possible, preferably beforehand, what feature of the quotation you want readers to appreciate. Often, this is best achieved by leaving out all inessential language.

A few good examples of interpretive sentences that feature embedded quotations:

- In *The Odyssey's* opening lines, Homer likens the telling of a tale to the sailing of a ship when he invokes the muse to “Launch out on [the] story” (1.11). Given that Odysseus is “the man of twists and turns” and that he is “driven time and again off course,” it should come as no surprise that the story shifts back and forth in time and is full of digressions (1.1-2).
- When the hero Tithonos became Dawn’s consort, he was granted immortality but not eternal youth and so dwindled over the years to little more than a pulsing ember. Book Five begins with the epic’s only mention of him—“Now Dawn rose from her bed, where she lay by haughty Tithonos”—as apt context for Odysseus’s escape from the nymph Kalypso, who “had hopes [to] make him immortal and all his days to be endless” but might also have neglected to secure his vim (*Od.* 5.1, 136). The book’s conclusion hints again at his avoidance of Tithonos’s tragic fate when, bedding down near the shore of Scheria, Odysseus “burie[s] himself in the leaves” as one “buries a burning log in a black ash heap . . . and saves the seed of fire” (5.488-91).
- Penelope turns upon Odysseus the kind of trick he has used upon others when she orders their “firm bed” to be moved “here outside for him” (23.179). When he protests that “it would be difficult . . . / To change its position” because, having built their marital chamber around an olive tree’s trunk, he “ma[de] a bed post of it,” Odysseus passes, by virtue of his sincere confusion, her clever test (184-86, 198). Husband and wife thus exemplify the “sweet agreement” (*homophrosyne*) of like-mindedness (*homophronte*) that Odysseus had recommended to the Phaiakian princess, Nausikaa, as the “steadfast” basis for “a harmonious household” (6.181, 182, 183-84).