

Introducing Evidence (Quotations)

You should never have a quotation standing alone as a complete sentence, or, worse yet, as an incomplete sentence, in your writing. Quotations are like helium balloons. When you let go of a helium balloon, it flies away. In a way, the same thing happens when you present a quotation that is standing all by itself in your writing, a quotation that is not "held down" by one of your own sentences. The quotation will seem disconnected from your own thoughts and from the flow of your sentences.

1. Introduce the quotation with a complete sentence and a colon. Examples:

In "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," Thoreau states directly his purpose for going into the woods: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

Thoreau's philosophy might be summed up best by his repeated request for people to ignore the insignificant details of life: "Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!"

Thoreau ends his essay with a metaphor: "Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in."

This is an easy rule to remember: if you use a complete sentence to introduce a quotation, you need a colon after the sentence. Be careful not to confuse a colon (:) with a semicolon (;).

2. Use an introductory or explanatory phrase, but not a complete sentence, separated from the quotation with a comma. Examples:

In "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," Thoreau states directly his purpose for going into the woods when he says, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

Thoreau suggests the consequences of making ourselves slaves to progress when he says, "We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us."

According to Thoreau, "We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us."

You should use a comma to separate your own words from the quotation when your introductory or explanatory phrase ends with a verb such as "says," "said," "thinks," "pondered," "recalls," "questions," and "asks". You should also use a comma when you introduce a quotation with a phrase such as "According to Thoreau."

3. Make the quotation a part of your own sentence without any punctuation between your own words and the words you are quoting. Examples:

In "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," Thoreau states directly his purpose for going into the woods when he says that "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

Thoreau suggests the consequences of making ourselves slaves to progress when he says that "We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us."

According to Thoreau, people are too often "thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls."

In some examples, "that" replaces the comma which would be necessary without "that" in the sentence.

Adapted from "Integrating Quotes into Sentences" <https://www2.ivcc.edu/rambo/eng1001/quotes.htm>

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Thoreau suggests the consequences of making ourselves slaves to progress when he says that "We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us."

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