

The quote “sandwich”

You can use many kinds of evidence to support a claim—examples, anecdotes, explanations, research results, or statistics, for example. You may also use other people’s words. What’s important is to connect the quote to your claim so that the quote clearly supports it—you cannot just drop a quote in without adding a comment, explanation, reflection, or connection. The quote exists to help *you* make *your* point, so you need to clearly state what the quote means to you and how it connects to your point. The quote can never do all that by itself. It may help to think of a sandwich with the quote itself as the important stuff in the middle. A sandwich has to have a top piece—an attribution phrase introducing it—and a bottom piece—your own interpretation, explanation or connection.

The top piece: the attribution phrase

Whether you use someone’s exact words or you paraphrase them, start with an attribution phrase to signal the reader that what follows is not your own, original idea. You have a lot of choices of attribution signals; here are some of them (for more, see [Citing Sources with Signal Phrases](#)):

In the words of Mark Twain
According to Mark Twain

Mark Twain says
Mark Twain maintains

The middle piece: the quote itself

The quote is the important stuff in the middle. Here is a quote from Mark Twain:

“If you hold a cat by the tail, you learn things you cannot learn any other way.”

The bottom piece: the reflection

The bottom piece is where you make the quote do the work you want it to do. It shows how the quote applies to *your* point. (That means you can’t pluck a random quote out of source material in order to reach some kind of “quota” of quotes!) The bottom piece can do any of several things: it can restate or interpret the quote. It can explain a dense or abstract quote or reflect on its broader implications. For instance, the Mark Twain quote above could make any of several points depending on how you craft the bottom piece.

One point could be that experiential learning is deeper than other kinds of learning. In that case, we might say this:

Mark Twain once said, “If you hold a cat by the tail, you learn things you cannot learn any other way.” In other words, what we learn from our own experiences can be very different from and more vivid than what we learn by hearing or reading about other people’s experiences.

A different point could be that we cannot learn new things without taking risks.

In the words of Mark Twain, “If you hold a cat by the tail, you learn things you cannot learn any other way.” Twain means that if we are willing to take risks, we may suffer a few injuries, but we will never forget the lesson.

Yet another point could be that even simple events and experiences can have a big impact:

Mark Twain says, “If you hold a cat by the tail, you learn things you cannot learn any other way.” Twain is saying that even simple everyday experiences teach us important things in unforgettable and sometimes painful ways.

Contributed by Rosemary McKeever

