

The Quote "Sandwich"

You can use many kinds of evidence to support a claim or thesis. You can use examples, anecdotes, explanations, research results, or statistics. You may also use direct quotes from others. However, you must connect the quote to your claim so that it clearly supports it. You cannot just drop a quote in without adding an explanation, analysis, or connection to your own ideas.

It may help to think of the quote as a sandwich: the quote itself is the important stuff in the middle. But it must have a top piece—introductory information—and a bottom piece—your own interpretation, explanation, or analysis—to hold it all together.



TOP PIECE: Introductory Information

- In the words of Mark Twain, ...
- According to Mark Twain, ...
- Mark Twain says, ...

THE MIDDLE: Quote, Summary, or Paraphrase

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

BOTTOM PIECE: Interpretation, Explanation, or Analysis

In other words, what we learn from our own experience can be very different from what we learn by reading or hearing about other people's.

TOP PIECE: The example above introduces the quote with only an attribution—who said it. However, in some essays, you may need to provide background information about the author as well. You may also need to provide contextual information so that the quote makes sense; this is especially true if the quote references a person or idea not evident in the quote itself.

THE MIDDLE: The example above includes a quote in the middle, but it could just as easily have been a summary or paraphrase from a source.

BOTTOM PIECE: The example above concludes with explanation, but you may also need to connect the explanation to your thesis or to the ideas of other sources. Furthermore, you may need to analyze the significance of those ideas. A quote can never do all this by itself.