

DIAGNOSING COMMON PROBLEMS WITH USE OF QUOTATIONS

Rutgers University Writing Centers
Plangere Writing Center ♦ Livingston Writing Center ♦ Douglass/Cook Writing Center

WHAT TO STRIVE FOR:

What we strive for in our response to most quotations is analysis: to comment on the form or content of the quotation in such a way that our reader's understanding of the quotation (and the essay) will increase.

What we strive for in response to some quotations that contain useful theories is relationship: to comment on how the ideas in the quotation can help us question and analyze other quotations/essays/circumstances/etc.

WHAT TO AVOID:

► **PARAPHRASE**: repetition of what the quote already says in slightly different words.

Example:

"Between Mr. Muhammad's teachings, my correspondence, my visitors and my reading of books, months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life" (221). Malcolm X felt more free in prison than he ever had in his life because he was expanding his mind with reading and writing and studying.

► **MISREADING**: saying the quotation means or says something that it doesn't.

Example:

"Between Mr. Muhammad's teachings, my correspondence, my visitors and my reading of books, months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life" (221). When Malcolm X says that he is "truly free" what he really means is that he is miserably unhappy.

► **KITE FLYING**: responding to the quotation by drifting off the immediate subject (Malcolm X's essay), often into generalizations about "you" or "people" or "society."

Example:

"Between Mr. Muhammad's teachings, my correspondence, my visitors and my reading of books, months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life" (221). In our society, many people read books to help expand their minds.

► **EXHORTATION**: often another way to drift off the immediate subject, this involves telling the reader what is right and wrong, often using the words "should" or "shouldn't." WORDS TO AVOID: should, shouldn't, must, mustn't, right, wrong, real, true.

Example:

"Between Mr. Muhammad's teachings, my correspondence, my visitors and my reading of books, months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life" (221). Malcolm X should have felt more remorse for his crimes.

WHAT TO DO:

1. Ask the student to reread her draft and circle the ideas that she feels she can develop.
2. Ask the student to write paragraphs developing these ideas, using quotations and explaining how the idea and the quotations relate to each other.

NOTES TO TUTORS:

An IDEA is defined as a comment on or interpretation of a text. In the Writing Program, we stress CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TWO TEXTS as a way of making interpretations.

An IDEA should NOT be:

- a generalization about any subject not having to do with the texts in the assignment; look for words such as "you," "an individual," "people," "society," etc. (See "Kite Flying" above.)
- an exhortation; look for "should" and "shouldn't." (See "Exhortation" above.)
- a question
- a summary

When you ask your student to identify an IDEA in her draft:

- If your student points to a generalization, ask her how that relates specifically to the text and the assignment, or *if* it does. If she can make it work, ask her to revise it as a statement about the text(s) she is working on.
- If your student points to an exhortation, remind her that no matter what we think things should or shouldn't be like, we have to deal with things as they are. Ask her to reframe her discussion around an analysis of *how* or *why* things happen rather than whether these things should or shouldn't happen.
- If your student points to a question as an idea, ask her to answer the question.
- If your student points to a summary, ask her if that sentence expresses an idea of her own about the text or simply retells what is in that text. IT IS IMPORTANT TO LET THE STUDENT FIGURE THIS OUT FOR HERSELF SO THAT SHE CAN DO IT LATER WHEN SHE IS ALONE.

Keep in mind, and remind the person you are working with, that AN IDEA MAY APPEAR ANYWHERE IN A ROUGH DRAFT, but that in revising it is a good plan to try to RESTATE THE IDEA AS A TOPIC SENTENCE.

Check in with the student regarding the SIZE OF THE IDEA. Does she feel that the idea is too general, too big for just one paragraph? If so, ask her to MAKE THE IDEA MORE SPECIFIC. (For example: "Malcolm X finds education empowering" is too big an idea for a paragraph, though not a bad idea for the paper's thesis; ask the student to name some specific ways that Malcolm X finds education "empowering" and to show you, in writing by examining quotations from Malcolm X, that what she suggests is true.)