



American Lit Writing Class
Lesson 3
October 13, 2015

Supports: 3-Sentence Quotations and the Microcosm Paragraph

Using textual evidence to support your thesis statement is the crux of writing from literature. Textual evidence, correctly presented, turns opinion into analysis. It is only when an argument is based on textual evidence that it can properly claim to explain what the book says – and this is the first and foremost goal of literary interpretation.

So, how do you present textual evidence correctly? Use the “3-Sentence Quotation” formula and you will never go wrong. This formula involves using three sentences for every piece of textual evidence: a set-up sentence, a quotation, and a follow-up sentence.

The set up sentence prepares the reader for the quotation by quickly describing the situation in which the quotation occurs and linking this situation to the essay’s argument.

Example:

When Dimmesdale ascends the scaffold in the novel’s climactic scene, he acknowledges that his salvation has come in part through owning his sin publicly.

The quotation itself comes in the middle of the 3-Sentence formula. It is placed in quotation marks, and includes an author/page citation at the end of the sentence, before final punctuation.

Example:

“He hath proved His mercy, most of all, in my afflictions...by bringing me hither, to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people! Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost forever” (Hawthorne 239).

The follow up sentence explains how the quotation helps prove the thesis statement. It is your most powerful statement of what the quotation means and why it is important. **NEVER USE A QUOTATION WITHOUT A FOLLOW UP SENTENCE!** The follow-up sentence is where you do most of your interpretive work.

Example:

Dimmesdale understands that by forcing him to admit his sin to the whole town, God has mercifully set him free from its power of damnation.

When you put the 3-sentence quotation together, you will find a complete paragraph beginning to take shape:

When Dimmesdale ascends the scaffold in the novel's climactic scene, he acknowledges that his salvation has come in part through owning his sin publicly. "He hath proved His mercy, most of all, in my afflictions...by bringing me hither, to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people! Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost forever" (Hawthorne 239). Dimmesdale understands that in forcing him to admit his sin to the whole town, God has mercifully set him free from its power of damnation.

Pay special attention to your follow-up sentences. Remember, they explain how the text supports your thesis, so they are key elements in your argument. In fact, you can use the follow-up sentences from each of your 3-sentence quotations to summarize (and refine) your essay even before you compose a draft. Here's how:

The Microcosm Paragraph

A microcosm is a miniature version of something – containing all of the same parts as the original, but on a smaller scale. A microcosm paragraph contains all the components of your argument in a single paragraph. It is a useful tool for refining your argument before it gets too long an unweildy. It also helps you to make sure that all the parts of your essay are doing their job of proving your thesis.

To construct a microcosm paragraph, arrange your follow-up sentences and your thesis statement like this:

- Thesis statement
 - Paraphrased version of your first follow-up sentence
 - Paraphrased version of your second follow-up sentence
 - Paraphrased version of your third follow-up sentence
 - Clincher sentence (paraphrased version of the thesis statement)
- } (in any order)

After you have a draft of your microcosm paragraph, read it closely. Does it clearly state and fully defend an arguable answer to the essay prompt? If not, how can the individual sentences be improved? You can rearrange and rewrite any of the sentences in your microcosm. When you do, simply go back and apply these changes to your 3-sentence quotations as well.

When it's time to construct a rough draft, the work you have done in writing a careful microcosm will save you considerable time and effort!

Assignment #3

1. Choose one of your thesis statements from Assignment #2.
2. Go back to **three** places in the text that helped you answer the prompt originally.
3. Identify specific sentences or phrases in each passage that support aspects of your thesis statement. These can be things said by one of the characters (that is, you can quote dialogue) or things said by the author/narrator (that is, you can quote narration).

They can provide illustrations or examples of your thesis; they can demonstrate logical steps toward your thesis; they can prove parts of your thesis; they can show reasons why your thesis is true.

4. Write THREE “3-Sentence Quotations,” as described above, one from each of these specific sentences or phrases. Use the author/page citation style described in your Writing Class Procedures document.

Set-up sentence A
Quotation A
Follow-up sentence A

Set-up sentence B
Quotation B
Follow-up sentence B

Set-up sentence C
Quotation C
Follow-up sentence C

5. Summarize your argument in a “Microcosm Paragraph.” The microcosm paragraph will help you structure your essay and ensure that it stays focused on proving and defending your thesis.

Your assignment should look like this:

Joe Student
Age 16
The Scarlet Letter
Assignment #3
October 20, 2015

Supports

Thesis Statement

Text of your thesis statement here.

3-Sentence Quotations

Set-up sentence A. Quotation A (with quotation marks and citation). Follow-up sentence A.

Set-up sentence B. Quotation B (with quotation marks and citation). Follow-up sentence B.

Set-up sentence C. Quotation C (with quotation marks and citation). Follow-up sentence C.

Microcosm Paragraph

Thesis statement. Paraphrased version of follow-up sentence A (or B or C).
Paraphrased version of follow-up sentence B (or A or C). Paraphrased version of follow-up sentence C (or A or B). Clincher sentence.

Three documents in your writing class folder will help you complete this assignment:

- Your Due Date Schedule tells when each assignment is due and when it will be returned.
- Your Writing Class Procedures explain the rules for formatting and turning in your assignments.
- Your Grading Rubric explains our standards for content, mechanics and style.