



Douglas College

Douglas College Learning Centre

## BUILDING A PARAGRAPH AROUND A QUOTATION

---

Academic paragraphs need support or evidence to backup the main points being made. One kind of support used frequently in academic papers is the quotation. This handout shows you one way to build a paragraph around a quotation. However, first you should see what to avoid when you use quotations.

### What Not To Do:

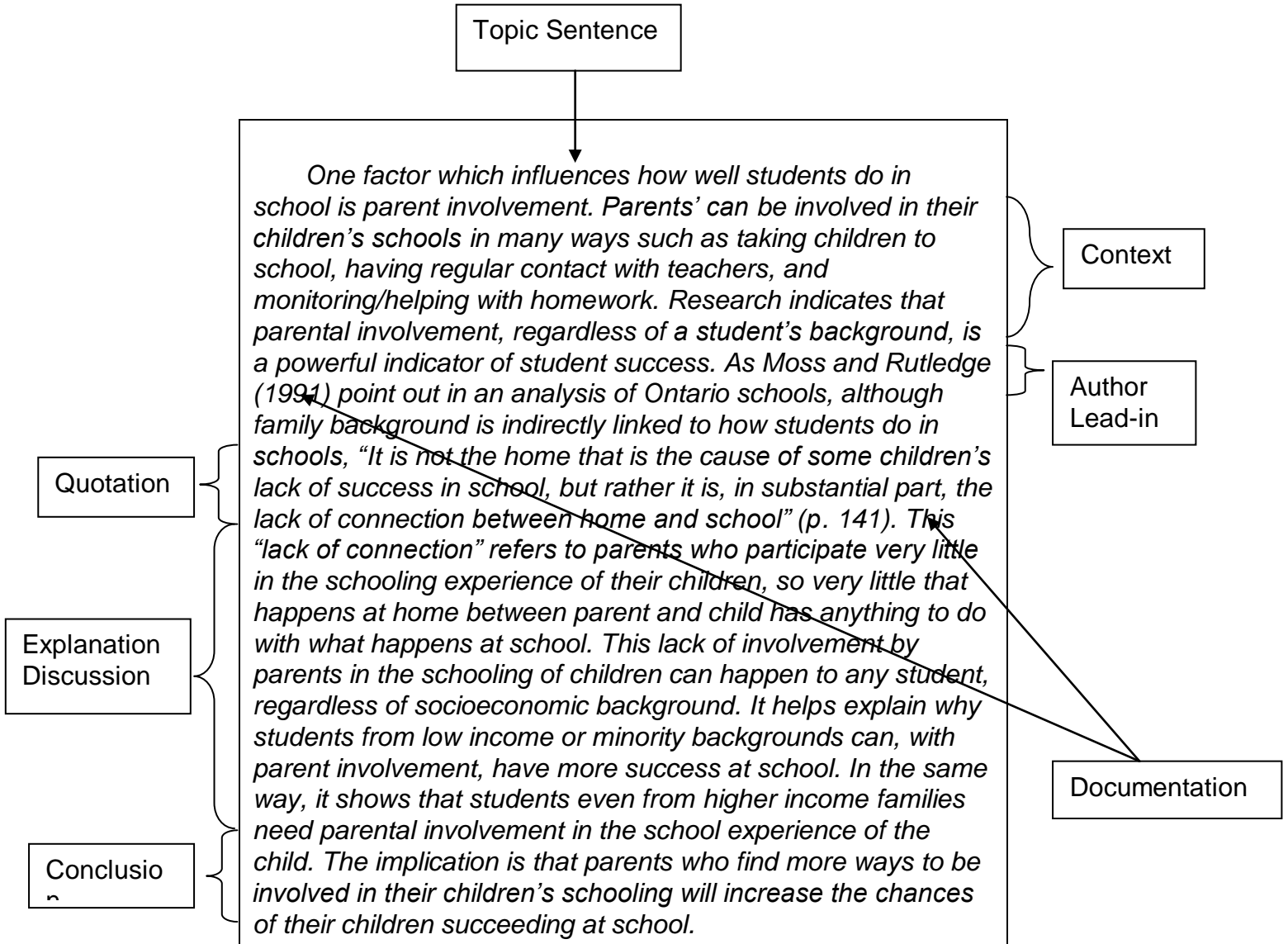
In most papers, you should not string together a patchwork of quotations, such as the writer did in the example below:

*According to Kimmel (1990), "Socioeconomic status, ethnic origin, intelligence, gender, and race tend to operate in complex . . . ways to limit the range of occupations open to an individual" (p. 293). He also explains that "educational background, contacts with a particular occupation through one's ethnic or religious groups and family members, and discrimination operate for or against an individual's movement into an occupation" (p. 293). Finally, he points out that "the boundaries thus created are often unfair to particular groups of people (notably African Americans, Hispanics, and the poor)" (p. 294).*

The problem in the above example is that a patchwork of quotations only “reports information;” in college level writing, instructors usually want more than copied information from a variety of sources. They want to see that **you**, the writer, can make a point and then support it with evidence. This means that most of your paragraphs should be your own analysis or explanation backed up by supporting evidence. One exception is in research reports where the “literature survey” section quickly summarizes the range of relevant studies done on a given topic (such as in a psychology research report).

## Providing Context and Explanation for a quotation:

A quotation usually needs to appear somewhere in the middle of a paragraph, sandwiched between an introduction and an explanation. Look at the following example:



The following seven steps provide you with one way to use quotations effectively. It is important to note that there are other ways to use quotations, but this is a standard and easy-to-follow way to do it.

## 1) Make Your Point (Topic Sentence)

Make a main point briefly.

*One factor which influences how well students do in school is parent involvement.*

The purpose is to tell the reader what you will show in the paragraph. It prepares the reader for what is coming. You should not do any of the work of explaining or of giving evidence or reporting information in the first sentence of a paragraph. For this reason, the first sentence of the paragraph should be brief.

## 2) Explain the Context

Provide a context or further explanation for your point.

*Parents' can be involved in their children's schools in many ways such as taking children to school, having regular contact with teachers, and monitoring/helping with homework. Research indicates that parental involvement, regardless of a student's background, is a powerful indicator of student success.*

The sentences after the topic paragraph should be used to help the reader understand more about your point, or to prepare the reader for the evidence (the quotation). This sentence can be used to:

- give background information
- explain the significance of your point
- define or highlight the meaning of your point

## 3) Provide an Author Lead-in

Introduce the author of the quotation.

*As Moss and Rutledge (1991) point out in an analysis of Ontario schools ...*

Give a phrase or sentence that signals the authorship of the quotation:

The author says "..."

Smith claims "..."  
 The article reports "..."  
 Jones and Lee suggest "..."

(The handout **Introducing Quotations--WR6.21**--gives more suggestions about how to introduce quotations).

## 4) Insert the Quotation

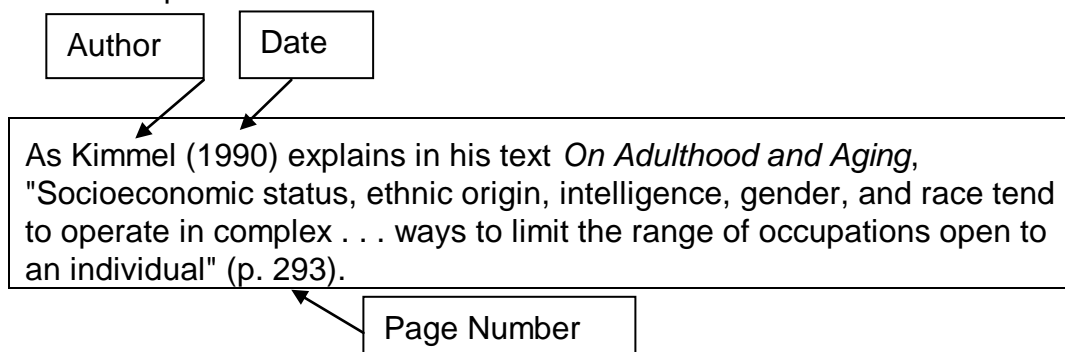
Use only enough of the quotation to make your point.

*. . . although family background is indirectly linked to how students do in schools, "It is not the home that is the cause of some children's lack of success in school, but rather it is, in substantial part, the lack of connection between home and school" (pp.141).*

Quotations need to quickly and clearly support your point. The reader should not be forced to read through long quotations, wondering what part of the quotation to pay attention to. Show the reader only the part of the quotation that clearly supports your point. Providing needed context and explanation is your job as writer. Do not expect your quotation to provide the context and explanation for you.

## 5) Document the Source

Document the quotation.



This means providing author and page number either in brackets after the information or in a footnote at the bottom of the page. The example above uses the APA style of documenting because it also includes the date after the author. Different departments at the college require different approaches to

documenting, and you need to find out which format is required by your instructor. The most popular formats are APA, MLA, and Chicago style. The library and the Learning Centre both have handouts and manuals on how to use each of these styles of documenting.

## 6) Interpret, Explain, Discuss

Explain how the quotation shows the point that you made in your first sentence of the paragraph.

Students often think that the quotation speaks for itself; they think the instructor knows so much about the topic that s/he can figure it out. However, the instructor wants to see that a student understands the relationship between the evidence (the quotation) and the point the student is making in the paragraph.

So, you cannot leave a quotation for your reader to figure out even if you think it's obvious. You could try either of the following approaches to add explanation to your quotation:

- You can focus the reader's attention on some particular idea or wording in the quotation that is relevant to your discussion, and then explain how that wording shows your point. Notice how the specific wording "lack of connection" is explained in the example below.
- You can explain the implications or relationships to other points you are making in the paper or how the quotation demonstrates the overall point you are making in the paragraph.

*This "lack of connection" refers to parents who participate very little in the schooling experience of their children, so very little that happens at home between parent and child has anything to do with what happens at school. This lack of involvement by parents in the schooling of children can happen to any student, regardless of socioeconomic background. It helps explain why students from low income or minority backgrounds can, with lots of parent involvement, have more success at school. In the same way it shows that students even from wealthier families need parental involvement in the school experience of the child.*

## 7) Finish with a Conclusion

Finish the discussion of the quotation with strong, energetic wording that connects back to your topic sentence and signals a finish to the paragraph.

*The implication is that parents who find more ways to be involved in their*

*children's schooling will increase the chances of their children succeeding at school.*

**Exercise: Identifying the Parts of a Paragraph**

Read the following paragraph. Label the 7 parts of the paragraph (topic sentence, context, author lead-in, quotation, documentation, interpretation/discussion, and conclusion).

*In expensive cities like Toronto and Vancouver, the ability of parents to participate in the schooling of their children can be difficult. One important factor is simply the cost of living. Few families can afford the 1950's and 1960's model of the stay-at-home mom and the breadwinner dad if they are to pay for the expensive housing, transportation, groceries, and commodities that most families expect to have as part of their lives. In a study about the need for public child care in Ontario, Lero and Kyle (1991) report that "almost 60% of two-parent families in Canada with children younger than 5 years of age are dual earner families?" (p. 29). This study shows that, even in the 1990's, both parents in the majority of families were in full time work. This is a dramatic shift from twenty years earlier when the majority of Canadian families had stay-at-home moms. If the trend continues, even more families will have two working parents. The result is that the very important factor of parent participation in the school experience of their children is becoming more difficult than before because both parents are spending a great deal of their energy at work. This makes it even more crucial now than in previous decades for parents to plan how they can take time after work to be involved in the school experience that is crucial to their children's futures.*

## Sources

Kimmel, D. C. (1990). *Adulthood and aging: An interdisciplinary, developmental view* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Lero, D.S. and Kyle, I. (1991). Work, families and child care in Ontario. In Laura C. Johnson and Dick Barnhorst (Eds.), *Children, families and public policy in the 90s* (pp. 25-72). Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing.

Moss, P. and Rutledge, D. (1991). Issues in education: A discussion of policy. In Laura C. Johnson and Dick Barnhorst (Eds.), *Children, families and public policy in the 90s* (pp. 133-152). Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing.

## ANSWER KEY

### Exercise: Identifying the Parts of a Paragraph

*In expensive cities like Toronto and Vancouver, the ability of parents to participate in the schooling of their children can be difficult. One important factor is simply the cost of living. Few families can afford the 1950's and 1960's model of the stay-at-home mom and the breadwinner dad if they are to pay for the expensive housing, transportation, groceries, and commodities that most families expect to have as part of their lives. In a study about the need for public child care in Ontario, Lero and Kyle (1991) report that "almost 60% of two-parent families in Canada with children younger than five years of age are dual earner families?" (p. 29). This study shows that, even in the 1990's, both parents in the majority of families were in full time work. This is a dramatic shift from twenty years earlier when the majority of Canadian families had stay-at-home moms. If the trend continues, even more families will have two working parents. The result is that the very important factor of parent participation in the school experience of their children is becoming more difficult than before because both parents are spending a great deal of their energy at work. This makes it even more crucial now than in previous decades for parents to plan how they can take time after work to be involved in the school experience that is crucial to their children's futures.*

Topic Sentence

Author Lead-in

Explanation/ Discussion

Context

Quotation

Conclusion

Documentation