

Using Textual Evidence in Constructed Responses

A Few Cautions

Here are a few tips to remember when using evidence from the text to illustrate your point:

- Remember that your response should “stand alone.” That means that the person reading your response should be able to understand your response, even if they have never read the original text.
- While someone else’s words can really help you make your point, the reader is most interested in your words, so make your references, paraphrases and quotes relatively brief.
- Choose what evidence you want to use carefully. Make sure you need it to illustrate your point. If it does not help you clearly present your ideas- leave it out.
- Always introduce the author and text. Make sure it is clear to the reader who is speaking and whose ideas you are writing about. Tell why we should care about who this person is and what this person has to say. Once you have introduced the author, refer to the author by the author’s last name.
- Please note that book titles, newspapers and journals should be underlined or italicized, and poem and article titles should be placed in quotation marks.
- Remember that all words in titles should be capitalized except for articles and prepositions, unless the title was not written that way originally. The first word should be capitalized even if it is an article or preposition.
- It is a good idea to reference information found in graphs, charts, tables, or captions that accompany photographs or illustrations. The author included these text features to provide additional or clarifying information.
- When your response is complete, the number of phrases or sentences taken directly from the text should be less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of your response. This means that if you wrote 100 words no more than 25 can be borrowed directly from the author.

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The Most Common Methods

There are three main ways to use evidence or examples from a text to illustrate your own points in an essay.

1. Making a Reference to the Author or the Text

This is a great way to begin your response. The first time you refer to the text you should include the name of the author and the title of the text. After this first “introduction,” you will use the only last name of the author or the title of the text.

An example of making a reference:

Reporter Kenneth Reich shares several plans to improve the Los Angeles River in his article, “Many Bridges to Cross to Revive L.A. River.”

2. Paraphrasing and Summarizing

When you paraphrase, you take a specific section of a text and put it into your own words. Putting it into your own words doesn’t mean just changing or rearranging a few of the author’s words. To paraphrase well and avoid plagiarism, try setting your source aside and restating the sentence or paragraph you have just read, as though you were describing it to another person. When you summarize, you are offering an overview of the entire text, the overall opinion of the author.

An example of summarizing an author’s viewpoint:

According to Lewis MacAdams and Robert Gottleib, two activists regarding the future of the Los Angeles River, many developers would like to turn the land near Chinatown into industrial areas with many warehouses.

3. Quoting Directly from the Text

When you quote, you are reproducing another writer’s words exactly as they appear on the page. Quotes are great to include if the author’s words are particularly brilliant, witty, edgy, or otherwise interesting. Quotations can also be helpful if you need the author’s expertise to back up your point. Quote if you are analyzing a writer’s tone or use of a specific word or phrase. It’s important to avoid “plop quotations,” that is, quotations that are just dropped into your paper without any clear connection to the surrounding text.

An example of quoting directly from the text:

The author clearly explains that the entertainment industry has given in to greed. He states, “They have recognized that the more violent the 'action' the more tickets will be sold.”

These tips were adapted from online resources:

<http://www.calstatela.edu/academic/english/comp/engl095/6-1-Using-Text.pdf>

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/evidence/>