Everything You Need to Know, or Almost, about Integrating Quotations Effectively

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The main thing to keep in mind, when integrating quotations, is that it takes considerable thought and thoughtfulness, or critical thinking. Ineffective integration of quotations is typically the result of thoughtlessness and often involves dropped-in quotations, also called “floating quotations,” when quotations are dropped in without any thought in terms of how they fit in the paragraph. There is nothing leading into or introducing the quotation. It is just there, dropped in. The most obvious sign of a dropped-in quotation is its appearance right after a sentence ending in a period or at the end of a complete clause ending in a semicolon.

Dropped-in quotations have the potential to become even more serious when the sources they come from are not correctly identified; the result is plagiarism.

The thoughtlessness that results in dropped-in quotations can come from ineffective selection of quotations. Quotations that merely restate the point may lead the writer to believe introducing it isn’t necessary as the connection is obvious. **Thus the writer needs to put thought into the selection of quotations,** intentionally choosing ones that leave room for and even necessitate the writer’s interpretation and explanation of them.
Effective placement of quotations is also important. Because the purpose of quotations is to support an idea or point of your own, quotations are most effective in research essays when placed in body paragraphs, which do the work of supporting the thesis. Also, keeping in mind the three steps of a body paragraph—
1. Point or Main Idea of the paragraph,
2. Support to prove the point,
3. Explanation of the significance of the point in relation to the overall argument (thesis): how it proves and develops that argument—we can see that quotations clearly belong in Step 2 as part of the support.

The next step is to weave the quotation into your paragraph and into your argument. As with paragraphs, there are steps to follow when working with quotations. They are:
1. Signal phrase with correct punctuation (a colon, a comma, or nothing depending on what is correct)
2. Quotation
3. In-text citation
4. Explanation
Some Definitions

- **A signal phrase** is a phrase that leads up to and prepares for the quotation.
- Some signal phrases identify the source, its author, title, context or background; this type of signal phrase is generally called an **attributive tag** or **attribution**.
There are a number of reasons one might want to use an attributive tag. For example:

- If an author you’re quoting is well-known as an expert in his/her field, name dropping of this kind can add to your credibility, that you knew of this expert and that you knew enough to draw upon his/her expert knowledge.
- If the publication carries some prestige in the field, referring to it can likewise gain you credibility.
- If the author’s ideas are controversial and clearly distinct from your own, you may name him/her in order to distinguish your own ideas and perspective from his/hers.
- If the context (when/where it was published, who wrote it, etc.) adds to our understanding of the ideas you’re quoting from the source.
- Etc.
But truly integrating quotations goes beyond merely identifying the author or source; it involves thinking critically about the connection between the quotation and your main idea. That is what a signal phrase does; it creates a bridge between the different parts of the paragraph and even between the different parts of the support. For example, if the quotation only suggests a connection to your point, a signal phrase before the quotation can prompt your reader to notice what you want him/her to in or about the quotation and can also help focus your interpretation and explanation of the quotation afterwards, thus prompting you to prove your point.

Often signal phrases and attributive tags are used in conjunction with each other.
Keep in mind the types of quotations:

- A **short quotation** (in prose) is under 4 lines once typed into your essay.
- A **long quotation** (in prose) is 4 full lines or more, again once typed into your essay.
- A **partial quotation** is a type of short quotation. It is a phrase or clause excerpted from the source that can be incorporated into your own sentence and syntax.
- A **complete quotation** is a complete sentence that can be introduced by your sentence, set off by a colon. Some short quotations are complete, and ALL long quotations are complete.
Ellipses are three spaced periods indicating material has been removed from inside a quotation; three spaced periods are used . . . in the middle of a single sentence. A fourth period is needed if removing material between two complete sentences so as not to create a run-on. . . . The fourth period is placed right next to the word at the end of the sentence before the material that has been removed. Ellipses are only needed at the end of a quotation if the end of the sentence from the original has been omitted. Ellipses are only needed at the beginning of a quotation if the beginning of the sentence has been omitted AND the first word is capitalized as in this case the reader may not be able to tell that part of the sentence has been removed. Note: Only information that doesn’t change the meaning of the original may be removed; typically what is removed is information that would be irrelevant or extraneous in the writer’s essay.

Brackets are used to add clarifying information [such as a word or phrase] or to make changes to the quotation that don’t change the meaning but enable it to fit into its new context. Most of these changes involve small grammatical changes (to verb tense or pronouns); for example, the author of the original might use the first person “I” to refer to him or herself, but you would use the third person “he” or “she” to refer to him or her. Similarly, the author might use present tense verbs, referring to events that for him/her were happening in the present, but because the event being described is one in your past, when you write about it, you use past tense verbs, so you may need to change the verb tense of the quotation to fit the syntax of your paragraph.
In this next section, you will see how one can build a body paragraph and effectively integrate different types of quotations using signal phrases and attributive tags.

The topic of my essay is the sofa, and the article being used is “Man at His Best: Design” by Tom Junod in Esquire on page 70 of the March, 2002 issue found using the NVC Library database.

My thesis is: To many working adults, sofas represent comfort.

The purpose of my essay is to prove this belief and to explain its importance, why comfort is so important to working adults (but even possibly why believing that sofas represent comfort is so important). Each paragraph should add to the reader’s (and writer’s) understanding of the thesis, building up to the conclusion where it will finally be fully developed.
So first I need to decide on a support Point, a main idea for the paragraph, which relates to the thesis and will be used to support it. (This sentence is sometimes called the Topic Sentence or Point Sentence).

For example: Sofas may have become ubiquitous, something we see in almost every abode, but it’s clear they are, nevertheless, often associated with luxury. (The point is that sofas are associated with luxury.)

And if I apply the 3 steps for a Body Paragraph to my topic, they are:

1. Point: Sofas may have become ubiquitous, something we see in almost every abode, but it’s clear they are, nevertheless, often associated with luxury.
2. Support with evidence, including the quotation.
3. Explanation of how and why the idea of sofas as luxury helps prove they represent comfort to working adults: Why is luxury associated with comfort? What is comfortable about luxury? What kind of comfort is suggested? What do this paragraph and point add to our understanding of the meaning and importance of comfort to working adults?
Then, I need to decide on a quotation I want to use. I like much of the essay, but fair use and my own purpose require that I limit my use of it to only what’s relevant. So here’s one section of the original I like:

The sectional isn't just a couch; it's a lifestyle and so is tainted by all the prejudices that taint the word lifestyle itself. The sectional is the Jacuzzi of couches. It is the California of couches, not only in terms of size and shape and population density, but also in its perhaps unfair association with recreational immorality. Though most sectionals do yeoman's duty in suburban living rooms, they still manage to be redolent of an orgy because of their Kama sutra-esque flexibility and because they are far too often made of leather.
Even this entire section may not be necessary, though, so next I’ll see what part(s) of the quotation I really need to use. I realize that the part about “the word lifestyle” isn’t necessary either to understand the author’s main idea or to support mine, so I’ll remove it. The rest of the quotation all seems to have potential, so I’ll leave it for now. Here’s the end result:

The sectional isn’t just a couch. . . . The sectional is the Jacuzzi of couches. It is the California of couches, not only in terms of size and shape and population density, but also in its perhaps unfair association with recreational immorality. Though most sectionals do yeoman’s duty in suburban living rooms, they still manage to be redolent of an orgy because of their Kama sutra-esque flexibility and because they are far too often made of leather.
And **finally I need to think critically about how this quotation will fit into the support for my point.** Is it significant and substantial? Can I draw multiple conclusions from it or make multiple observations about it? Could it thus be my major example and the only one I really need? Or will I need more examples in addition to this one in order to prove the point completely and convincingly?
Now I’m ready to start building the paragraph. First, I’ll reexamine the point (the highlighted first sentence in the paragraph below). Is it clear on its own, or do I need to explain it? Rereading it, I realize I might need to explain the concept of luxury and establish the premise of the sofa as a luxury. You’ll see what I’ve added below:

Sofas may have become ubiquitous, something we see in almost every abode, but it’s clear they are, nevertheless, often associated with luxury. As a luxury item, they often come with a high cost; some sofas are easily over $1,000. The fact that this expense is unnecessary also categorizes it as a luxury; one may need a place to sit, but one clearly doesn’t need a $1,000 place to sit. There are also many sofas that are designed with luxury in mind, with frames of rare woods, cushions filled with down, and upholstery of luxurious fabrics, such as velvet, silk, and leather. Even sofas constructed of less expensive materials increase in cost when increased in size.
Now I’m ready to introduce and integrate the source and quotation. While it’s possible to write a simple attributive tag, such as “Tom Junod writes,” I want to integrate this quotation into my support, which means keeping my main idea in the reader’s mind. To do this, I need to do more than simply say who wrote it or where it was published. Indeed, the most important element of this signal phrase will be pointing out the emphasis in the passage itself that relates to my point. In addition, however, I have an opportunity to gain some credibility with my name dropping by pointing out that the author is a known and respected journalist. Here’s what I came up with:

In an article in *Esquire*, award-winning journalist Tom Junod describes the trend of the sectional sofa, emphasizing its decadence:

Note that the facts that Tom Junod is a journalist and has won awards are common knowledge; I found them easily on the Internet mentioned on multiple sites, so I don’t need to cite them, but I have been careful to put them in my own words.
Ok, I’m ready to add the quotation. Here’s the paragraph so far along with the quotation:

Sofas may have become ubiquitous, something we see in almost every abode, but it’s clear they are, nevertheless, often associated with luxury. As a luxury item, they often come with a high cost; some sofas are easily over $1,000. The fact that this expense is unnecessary also categorizes it as a luxury; one may need a place to sit, but one clearly doesn’t need a $1,000 place to sit. There are also many sofas that are designed with luxury in mind, with frames of rare woods, cushions filled with down, and upholstery of luxurious fabrics, such as velvet, silk, and leather. Even sofas constructed of less expensive materials increase in cost when increased in size. In an article in *Esquire*, award-winning journalist Tom Junod describes the trend of the sectional sofa, emphasizing its decadence:

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Now I need to interpret the quotation, pointing out the decadence and explaining how it proves the point: the luxury of sofas. When interpreting and explaining a passage, I am not just paraphrasing or repeating what the quotation says. I need to think about not only what the quotation means but how it means it and why. To prepare, let me analyze the quotation, breaking it down into parts and thinking about the meaning and relevance of each part:

**Quotation:** The sectional isn’t just a couch. . . .

**Interpretation:** The word “just” is the one emphasized here, insisting that the sectional is important, more important even than the couch, but also suggesting couches, at least ones that are sectionals, are important. It’s not just an object; it’s more important than that. It’s important.
Quotation: The sectional is the Jacuzzi of couches. Interpretation: Even if someone wants to argue that sofas are a necessity, clearly the line is drawn at sectionals with this analogy that compares sectionals to Jacuzzis and by extension couches to pools. While pools might be used for swimming/exercise and ultimately health and so might be considered legitimate and necessary (though arguably, owning a pool is not necessary), Jacuzzis are used to lounge and relax and thus selected by Junod, because they are most certainly luxury items and symbols of unmistakable decadence.
Quotation: It is the California of couches, not only in terms of size and shape and population density, but also in its perhaps unfair association with recreational immorality.

Interpretation: To much of the rest of the country (and Junod is from New York), California is a symbol of extravagance and decadence. Junod extends the analogy between sectionals and the state pointing out their similar L/curved shapes, their similar large sizes, and their similar population density (a cute reference to how many people fit on a sectional in contrast to a regular sofa or other states, also implicitly hinting at their common desirability and popularity. The second half of this sentence (after the “but”) is what connects most clearly to the decadence both by mentioning the sectional’s and state’s recreational purpose and, of course, their perceived immorality. While not all recreational activities are immoral, it is recreational activities that are deemed immoral, not typically work-related ones. We also often refer euphemistically to doing drugs or having sex as recreational activities, and that association is evoked here. Also, decadence by its nature is considered by Americans to be somewhat immoral (a perspective tied to our Puritan origins also mentioned by Junod in the concluding paragraph of his essay). His judgment of this association as “unfair” is tongue-in-cheek, but so is the association and overall analogy itself, but the judgment, nevertheless, is serious in pointing out American attitudes toward these subjects. Overall, the essay blends humor and criticism, resulting in satire.
Quotation: Though most sectionals do yeoman’s duty in suburban living rooms, they still manage to be redolent of an orgy because of their Kama sutra-esque flexibility and because they are far too often made of leather. (70)

Interpretation: Interestingly, each of the last three sentences in this quoted passage is longer than the previous one, which suggests the decadence is taking over, the writing in this case the same way the sectional and its decadence take over the sectional owners’ lives and living rooms. The first part of the sentence about the actual work/functionality of sofas, even sectionals, is irrelevant though adds seriousness and credibility to Junod’s argument. Without it the reader, especially one who wants to shout, “It’s just a sofa!” would see the humor but not the seriousness and tend to reject any social criticism and awareness the essay might have to offer. The next clause returns to the examination of sectionals as decadent, calling them “redolent [suggestive or reminiscent] of an orgy.” While “redolent” has neutral connotations, it is a heavier word than other synonyms, like those listed above in brackets, especially in its resonant sound and lesser familiarity. It is an extravagant word, what my eighth-grade English teacher would call a ten-dollar word (rather than a one-dollar word, the simpler, more familiar kind). Of course, far more decadent is the orgy a sectional is supposedly redolent of. Sex in itself is suggestive of decadence (and the immorality mentioned in the previous sentence), sex on a sofa (which is hardly necessary) even more so, and this is an orgy, sex in the extreme, sex out of bounds and out of control. And even this idea Junod extends to the extreme, to the exotic “Kama sutra” and adding “flexibility,” so that he’s clearly talking about and we’re picturing exciting sex. And then he adds leather which when referring to a sofa is fairly ordinary but not when sex is already in the picture. So now he would have us picture skin on skin. But really he is using this analogy not just for the sex appeal or titillation but because he wants us to recognize the appeal of leather in a sofa, the extravagance and decadence it connotes whether or not sex is literally in the picture.
So you can see: **when you choose the right quotation, the thinking, interpretation, and explanation can expand and expand.** For four quoted sentences, I have paragraphs of material, which I will now need to cut down to size, using only what is most relevant.
Sofas may have become ubiquitous, something we see in almost every abode, but it’s clear they are, nevertheless, often associated with luxury. As a luxury item, they often come with a high cost; some sofas are easily over $1,000. The fact that this expense is unnecessary also categorizes it as a luxury; one may need a place to sit, but one clearly doesn’t need a $1,000 place to sit. There are also many sofas that are designed with luxury in mind, with frames of rare woods, cushions filled with down, and upholstery of luxurious fabrics, such as velvet, silk, and leather. Even sofas constructed of less expensive materials increase in cost when increased in size. In an article in *Esquire*, award-winning journalist Tom Junod describes the trend of the sectional sofa, emphasizing its decadence:

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By claiming that sectionals are more than “just” couches and then comparing them to Jacuzzis, California, and sex, Junod points out their extravagance and ultimately their decadence. Sectionals are not “just” necessities; they are luxuries, aimed at enjoyment, not survival. Junod takes the extravagance a step further by evoking extremes of enjoyment, the hedonism associated with Jacuzzis and California. Mentioning orgies—sex in the extreme—in the next sentence seems almost redundant. Junod, a New Yorker, clearly knows that for many non-Californians, California itself conjures up the image of free-wheeling singles or couples having sex indiscriminately in their Jacuzzis (peacock feathers, optional). Though he acknowledges the “association with recreational immorality” may be unfair, he doesn’t contradict the image of sex and drugs and California overall as a den of iniquity. But, of course, he is not really talking about California but about sectionals and couches. And while it may be possible to have sex indiscriminately, or drugs, on one’s sectional, he is not describing literal activities but making an analogy. Even the tongue-in-cheek nature of his satire, however, cannot dispel the serious social criticism it uncovers. While the sex, drugs, and Jacuzzis may simply be stereotyping and hyperbole, Junod is perceptive in pointing out the value we place on hedonism.
The last step of my paragraph is to connect the dots, creating a bridge from the interpretation of the quotation back to my point and finally to the thesis. The transition from one step and the next may not be apparent, especially if they’re done effectively. But notice how toward the end I start opening my interpretation up from looking at particular passages and meanings to the overall purpose of the passage and author and relating it to my meaning. In this case, I am picking up on and emphasizing the importance of hedonism.
Survival and mere necessities are no longer sufficient to make or keep us comfortable. We “need” luxury, pleasure in the extreme, pleasure for its own sake, and the sofa makes this luxury of comfort tangible. But we might also understand the word “luxury” to mean something that is rare and hard to come by, and comfort is often such a luxury for working adults, who outside their homes subject themselves and sacrifice their own comfort to others’ wills. So we need access to comfort and feel we deserve it all the more in our own homes.
On the next pages is the complete paragraph, MLA formatted. Look for examples of:

- A signal phrase
- An attributive tag
- A blocked/complete quotation
- Ellipses
- A short/partial quotation
- In-text citation
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Keep in mind that working with only one source in a paragraph is much easier than working with more. Adding a quotation from an additional source would require an additional signal phrase and interpretation, potentially making for an extremely long paragraph. Also, with just one source, I may need only one attributive tag, and in this case, because the whole article is on a single page, I needed only one in-text citation. I just need to be sure to mark clearly what comes from the source, distinguishing it from my ideas. (Integrating paraphrasing and summary is more complicated and likely will need more attributive tags/in-text citation, but we’ll learn about that in the next section.)

In the coming weeks, you will be practicing working with quotations (and paraphrasing and summary) and building paragraphs of your own with them. Feel free to save this PowerPoint to your computer or to print it out, so you can refer back to it.