

Avoiding Dropped Quotations

What are they?

Dropped quotations are lines or passages from the text that stand alone as sentences, or are spliced into sentences in a grammatically incorrect manner.

For example:

In his short story, "Little Things," Raymond Carver clearly shows a conflict between the two characters. A couple is fighting over custody of their baby. "She would have it, this baby. She grabbed for the baby's other arm. She caught the baby around the wrist and leaned back. But he would not let go. He felt the baby slipping out of his hands and he pulled back very hard."

Why is this a problem?

As a matter of style, dropping quotations is simply not elegant. As a matter of content, dropped quotations demonstrate a lack of mastery over the material and a lack of context for the quoted information. Who is saying this? Why? What does it mean? How does it relate to your thesis? The reader should not have these questions when you are using textual evidence.

How do I fix the problem?

There are three easy fixes:

1. Use a simple "signal phrase":
Carver writes, "She would have it, this baby. She grabbed for the baby's other arm. She caught the baby around the wrist and leaned back. But he would not let go. He felt the baby slipping out of his hands and he pulled back very hard" (2).
2. Choose key words and phrases and blend them into your own sentence
Carver writes that the mother "grabbed" the baby while the father "pulled back very hard" (2).
3. Use block quotation format for quotes longer than four lines:
Carver writes:
She would have it, this baby. She grabbed for the baby's other arm. She caught the baby around the wrist and leaned back. But he would not let go. He felt the baby slipping out of his hands and he pulled back very hard. (2)

Note punctuation of citations in the above examples.

See the back of this handout and the other Writing Center links for more examples of dropped and blended quotations.

Dropped quotation:

McMurphy also engages in a game of manipulation similar to that of the Nurse, as he manages to make a fool of her on several occasions, further undermining her authority and psychological hold over the patients. “She’s glaring at those big white whales leaping round his shorts in pure wordless outrage. That’s more’n she can take” (88). The Nurse was compelled to surrender because she could not bear to have the other patients see her in a vicious, vengeful state brought on by McMurphy, so she temporarily abandoned her desire to chastise him.

Blended quotations:

McMurphy also engages in a game of manipulation similar to that of the Nurse, as he manages to make a fool of her on several occasions, further undermining her authority and psychological hold over the patients. When she sees him in his boxers, she “glar[es] at those big white whales leaping round his shorts in pure wordless outrage. That’s more’n she can take” (88). The Nurse was compelled to surrender because she could not bear to have the other patients see her in a vicious, vengeful state brought on by McMurphy, so she temporarily abandoned her desire to chastise him.

By keeping the meeting delayed, the people of the ward can see the nurse is thrown off. Through subtle delays or obstructions, Bromden can see that “the nurse’s head gives one little jerk, barely enough to see, but my heart is suddenly roaring” (97). Even the slightest weakness in the Nurse fills Bromden with a sudden rush of emotion, a “roaring” that represents power and freedom.

After he volunteers Doctor Spivey to share news with the group, she reacts: “The nurse’s head gives one little jerk, barely enough to see, but my heart is suddenly roaring” (97).

The people of the ward can see the nurse is thrown off. Even the slightest “little jerk” in the Nurse fills Bromden with a “sudden” rush of emotion, a “roaring” in his “heart” that represents power and freedom (97).

SOURCE:

Online Handout from Port Washington Unified School District Website