WORKING WITH QUOTATIONS 3: ANALYSIS

To effectively support an argument, a quotation requires three parts: lead-in, citation, and analysis. This handout covers how write analysis that illuminatingly links quotations to larger claims. For guidance on lead-ins and citation, see Working with Quotations handouts 1 and 2.

An argument consists of a claim supported by evidence. **Analysis** is an explanation of how a specific piece of evidence serves to support a larger, more general claim. A biology experiment, for example, might investigate the effect of a specific protein on a human cell. The process of logical connections, observations, and inferences that we call analysis allows us to understand how this cellular evidence supports claims about the overall health of an entire body, or even an entire population. Like cells, quotations are small parts of a larger body, and analysis of quotations allows a writer to persuasively support larger claims about the body of a text or a body of knowledge.

WHEN TO ANALYZE

Most quotations require analysis when used as evidence for a larger claim, but not all of them do. Cases in which a quotation does not require the kind of thorough analysis outlined here include:

1. When the quotation's function is simply to note the source's position in a particular field of research. This is most common in literature review sections of papers in the sciences and social sciences, fields that tend to privilege summary over quotation.
2. When the source says something that the author wants to say, but does so in language that is more powerful or artful than the author can produce, in which case the author simply substitutes the source's words for her own.

Although not every quotation requires analysis, quoting a source usually indicates that its language warrants further engagement. It suggests that the source's words contain depth or nuance that cannot be summarized. In essence, the very act of quoting typically implies that the quotation is worthy of analysis.

HOW TO ANALYZE

The way a quotation supports your argument is not likely to be self-evident for your audience. If you want a quotation to make your main claim more persuasive, you need to make the quotation *do work* for your argument by analyzing it in a way that explains precisely *how* it bolsters the claim you are using it to make. This can be accomplished by working your way logically from the specific quotation to the more general claim you are trying to prove. It is useful to think of this as a three-step process:

1. State what you understand the quotation to mean, reframing, if possible, the language of the quotation in the terms of your argument.
2. Link the quotation to its immediate context or to the subclaim you are making locally (i.e. in that paragraph or section of your paper).
3. Explore the deeper implications of the quotation in a larger context related to your essay's more general main claim (e.g. an existing hypothesis, paradigm, or section of the field).

Linguist S. I. Hayakawa has dubbed the logical path from a specific piece of evidence to a more general claim the "ladder of abstraction." Your might consider the steps above the three rungs of the ladder of abstraction that you must ascend in order to explain how a quotation relates to your essay's main claim.

ANALYSIS IN ACTION

As an example of analysis that walks its audience down a clear logical path from a specific quotation to a more general main claim, consider this paragraph from an essay about Mark Twain's novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson*:

> In the first of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*'s series of aphorisms, Twain invokes the lie of race by comparing it to trumping in a card game. Wilson's declaration, "Tell the truth or trump—but get the trick" (1) puns on the word *trump*, which links lying to playing the prevailing card in a card game. This advice to lie to (or "trick") one's opponent in order to win is first taken up by Roxy, a slave and nursemaid who switches her infant son Chambers with her master's son Tom so that her progeny may grow up to be a wealthy southern gentleman. The interchangeability of Chambers—who is only 1/32 black—with Tom Driscoll hints at the broader fiction of race, which seems no more a part of one's identity than the clothes that Roxy swaps in order to pull off the identity switch. Read in these terms, Wilson's initial aphorism takes on a broader meaning that frames the entire novel. Roxy's effort to "trump" the constraints of race suggests that division of individuals along racial lines is not the truth, but rather a grand "trick" perpetrated by whites to promote the grand fiction of their superiority.

Lead-in:	In the first of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*'s series of aphorisms, Twain invokes the lie of race by comparing it to trumping in a card game.
Quote and Citation:	Wilson's declaration, "Tell the truth or trump—but get the trick" (1)…
Analysis, Level 1:	…puns on the word *trump*, which links lying to playing the prevailing card in a card game. This advice to lie to (or "trick") one's opponent in order to win…
Analysis, Level 2:	…is first taken up by Roxy, a slave and nursemaid who switches her infant son Chambers with her master's son Tom so that her progeny may grow up to be a wealthy southern gentleman.
Analysis, Level 3:	The interchangeability of Chambers—who is only 1/32 black—with Tom Driscoll hints at the broader fiction of race, which seems no more a part of one's identity than the clothes that Roxy swaps in order to pull off the identity switch. Read in these terms, Wilson's initial aphorism takes on a broader meaning that frames the entire novel. Roxy's effort to "trump" the constraints of race suggests that division of individuals along racial lines is not the truth, but rather a grand "trick" perpetrated by whites to promote the grand fiction of their superiority.

Breakdown

Level 1 restates or interprets the quotation's language. In this case, the author clarifies several puns that might not be apparent to the reader and conveys what he takes the quotation to mean, thereby establishing a stable foundation on which to build his argument about its larger implications. Level 2 examines the quotation's relationship to its immediate context, which, in this case, is the surrounding narrative of Twain's novel. The author argues that the quotation isn't simply about lying, but rather is specifically related to lying about one's race. Level 3 analyzes the quotation's broader or more abstract thematic relevance. In this case, the author uses Twain's representation of a character lying about her son's race to argue that Twain believes race itself to be a lie or "grand fiction." By walking this analytical path, the author has turned Twain's quotation from a cynical remark about opportunism into a far-reaching stance on race and race-relations.