

WRITING SKILLS

Sentence Starters for Embedding Evidence

64 frames, the punctuation rules, and the verbs that make a quotation carry an argument

CURRICULUM

VCE

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Dropped, introduced, embedded

Most essays lose marks in the same place: the sentence where the quotation arrives. The idea is fine. The evidence is well chosen. But the writing stalls, because the quotation has been parked in the paragraph instead of built into it.

There are three ways to handle evidence. Only one of them keeps your argument moving.

The examples below use an invented novel, so nothing here depends on a text you may not be studying. Call it *The Salt Line*. Its narrator is Ada; her brother is Tom. Swap in your own text and the mechanics are identical.

Dropped

DROPPED QUOTATION

Ada is emotionally restrained. "She carried a careful, portable grief." This shows that she is sad and does not want people to know.

The quotation sits alone as its own sentence. Nothing in your writing touches it. Then a third sentence arrives to explain what the second sentence was doing there. Three sentences, one idea, and the marker has watched you assemble the evidence rather than use it.

Introduced

INTRODUCED QUOTATION

Ada's restraint is clear in the way the narrator describes her sorrow. The narrator says, "She carried a careful, portable grief." This suggests that she keeps her feelings at a manageable size.

Better. The quotation is now attached to a sentence and the grammar holds. But the introduction is doing no analytical work — "the narrator says" tells the marker nothing they could not see — and the reading still arrives afterwards, in a separate sentence beginning with "this".

Embedded

EMBEDDED QUOTATION

Ada's grief is "careful, portable" — something packed rather than felt, sized so it can be carried into rooms where it cannot be mentioned.

One sentence. The quotation has become part of your grammar: remove the quotation marks and the sentence still reads. The two words you chose are the two words that matter, and the reading follows in the same breath rather than in a follow-up sentence starting with "this".

Embedding is not a decoration. It saves you roughly two sentences per piece of evidence. Across a 700 to 900 word analytical response — the suggested length for the written analytical responses in both Unit 3 Outcome 1 and Unit 4 Outcome 1 — that is a whole extra idea you now have room for.

THE TEST THAT SETTLES EVERY CASE

Read your sentence aloud with the quotation marks deleted. If it is still a grammatical English sentence, the evidence is embedded. If it turns into two sentences jammed together, or into a fragment, it is not.

The upgrade, step by step

Here is the process applied to a second piece of evidence, so you can run it on your own paragraphs tonight.

Start with what you have. Tom "kept the boat's name painted over, then painted it over again."

Step 1 — cut to the load-bearing words. You do not need the whole line. What is doing the work is *again*. Quote three or four words, not fifteen. Short quotations are easier to embed and prove you know which part matters.

Step 2 — decide what job this sentence has. Is it introducing evidence, analysing a language choice, linking to the author's intent, comparing two moments, conceding a counter-view, or moving to the next idea? One job per sentence. The frame bank in section 3 is organised by exactly these six jobs.

Step 3 — choose a verb that makes a claim. Not "shows". Something that commits you: *registers, undercuts, withholds, narrows*. The verb bank is in section 5.

Step 4 — write the sentence so the quotation sits inside your grammar.

BEFORE

Tom does not want to remember. "He kept the boat's name painted over, then painted it over again." This shows he is trying to forget his past.

AFTER

Tom paints the boat's name out and then "painted it over again" — a second coat over nothing, which registers forgetting as labour rather than relief.

Step 5 — check the tense and the pronouns still agree. If they do not, square brackets fix it. Section 4 covers the punctuation.

ONE QUOTATION, ONE CLAIM

A quotation embedded well makes exactly one point. If you find yourself listing three techniques off one line, you are describing the sentence rather than reading it. Pick the strongest, and spend the space you saved on why it matters.

Sixty-four sentence frames, grouped by job

Fill the gaps with your own text. These are scaffolds for drafting, not lines to reproduce verbatim in an exam — used well, they train the sentence shape until you no longer need the list. Do not use more than one or two from the same group in a single paragraph, or the rhythm becomes obvious.

A. Introducing evidence (1–12)

1. When _____, _____ is described as "_____".
2. _____'s decision to _____ is registered in the phrase "_____".
3. The narrative marks the shift the moment _____, "_____".
4. _____ appears first as "_____", and the label sticks.
5. By the time _____, _____ can only "_____".
6. The scene turns on a single word: _____ is "_____".
7. _____'s language narrows to "_____ " once _____.
8. What _____ will not say is audible in "_____".
9. Placed directly after _____, the description of _____ as "_____ " reads as _____.
10. _____ reaches us through _____ rather than through _____: "_____".
11. The reader learns _____ before _____ does, in the aside that _____ is "_____".
12. Even _____ concedes _____, calling it "_____".

B. Analysing language (13–24)

13. "_____ " carries _____, which recasts _____ as _____.
14. The verb "_____ " does the work here: it makes _____ rather than _____.
15. Choosing "_____ " over the neutral "_____ " turns _____ into _____.
16. The metaphor of _____ holds only while _____; it collapses when _____.
17. Repetition of "_____ " flattens _____ into _____.
18. The sentence stops at "_____ ", and the silence after it does the arguing.
19. "_____ " is a small word carrying _____, because _____.
20. The image of _____ returns at _____ and at _____, weaker each time.
21. Placing "_____ " at the end of the clause leaves the reader holding _____.
22. Because "_____ " belongs to the vocabulary of _____, applying it to _____ suggests _____.
23. The move from "_____ " to "_____ " tracks _____'s shift from _____ to _____.
24. The passive construction in "_____ " removes _____ from _____.

C. Linking to the author's intent (25–34)

- 25. _____ builds _____ out of _____ so the reader _____ before _____.
- 26. By withholding _____ until _____, _____ makes _____ a matter of _____ rather than _____.
- 27. The structure invites the reader to _____, then makes that _____ uncomfortable when _____.
- 28. _____ gives _____ the language of _____, and in doing so exposes _____.
- 29. The text does not resolve _____; the refusal is the argument, because _____.
- 30. Positioning _____ as _____ lets _____ argue that _____ without stating it.
- 31. Our sympathy is directed by _____ rather than by _____.
- 32. The reader is placed _____: close enough to _____, far enough to _____.
- 33. What _____ presents as _____, the text quietly frames as _____.
- 34. The cost of _____ is measured rather than asserted, in _____.

D. Comparing two moments (35–44)

- 35. Early on, _____; by _____, the same _____ has become _____.
- 36. The two scenes rhyme: _____, and then _____.
- 37. Where _____ is "_____", _____ is only "_____".
- 38. "_____" returns at _____, but the speaker has changed and so has its weight.
- 39. What is played as _____ in _____ is played as _____ in _____.
- 40. _____ and _____ face the same choice; the difference is _____.
- 41. Read against _____, _____ looks less like _____ and more like _____.
- 42. The image of _____ that once promised _____ now _____.
- 43. If _____ establishes _____, _____ tests it.
- 44. The distance between "_____" and "_____" measures _____.

E. Conceding a counter-view (45–54)

- 45. It is true that _____; what that reading misses is _____.
- 46. _____ can be read as _____, and the text encourages it, until _____.
- 47. A reader could take _____ at face value. "_____" makes that difficult.
- 48. _____ is partly _____. But _____, and so _____.
- 49. The obvious reading of _____ is _____; the more exact one is _____, because _____.
- 50. Granting that _____, _____ still _____.
- 51. This does not make _____ _____. It makes _____ _____.
- 52. The text allows _____, but never _____.
- 53. _____ is sympathetic without being _____, and the difference matters because _____.
- 54. Even if _____, the _____ of "_____" holds.

F. Transitioning between ideas (55–64)

- 55. That reading becomes harder to hold once _____.
- 56. The same pressure surfaces in _____, where _____.
- 57. If _____ is the cost, _____ is the compensation.
- 58. This is where _____ turns from _____ into _____.
- 59. _____ is only half of it; the other half is _____.
- 60. Having established _____, the text moves to _____.
- 61. The consequence arrives at _____.
- 62. Nothing in _____ prepares the reader for _____, which is why _____.
- 63. What begins as _____ ends as _____.
- 64. That holds until _____.

Punctuation for quoting

Every rule below is shown with one correct example. Get these right and your writing looks controlled before the marker has read a word of your argument.

Ellipsis: cutting the middle out

Three spaced or unspaced dots mark words you have removed from inside a quotation. Use it to keep a quotation short. Do not use it at the start or end of a quotation — the marker already knows you did not quote the whole book.

Correct: Ada describes the town as "a place that forgave nothing ... and remembered everything".

THE ELLIPSIS THAT CHANGES THE MEANING

Cutting "he was not, in any ordinary sense, brave" down to "he was ... brave" is a misquotation, not an abbreviation. If the removed words reverse or qualify the sense, you cannot cut them.

Square brackets: changing tense, pronouns or clarity

Square brackets mark *your* words inside someone else's. Use them to make a quotation fit your sentence's grammar. Round brackets do not do this job.

Tense: Tom "[keeps] the boat's name painted over" long after anyone asks about it.

Pronoun: The narrator observes that "[Ada] never once said the word aloud".

Clarity: Ada calls it "the only thing [her mother] left behind".

Use the brackets sparingly. If a quotation needs three separate bracket repairs to fit, the sentence around it is wrong — rebuild the sentence instead.

Quotations inside quotations

Australian convention: double quotation marks for the quotation, single marks for a quotation inside it. Be consistent across the whole essay — pick one system and never mix.

Correct: The narrator reports that Ada "said only 'later', and meant never".

Verse and line breaks

When you quote two or more lines of poetry or verse drama inline, mark each line ending with a forward slash, with a space either side. Keep the original capitalisation.

Correct: The speaker sets the two against each other — "The tide takes what it likes / and returns what it cannot use" — before turning the image on herself.

Quoting a single line needs no slash. If you quote three or more lines, most schools prefer an indented block; ask your teacher which they want, and use one approach throughout.

The small mechanical rules that still cost marks

- **No comma before an embedded quotation.** "Ada's grief is 'careful, portable'" takes no comma. A comma only appears where a reporting clause introduces speech: *The narrator writes, "...".*
- **Punctuation goes outside the closing mark** unless it was part of the original quotation. Ada is "careful, portable". But: Ada asks, "Where would I even put it?"
- **Keep the original spelling and capitals.** If the original is odd and you want to show you noticed, that is what analysis is for; do not silently correct it.
- **Titles are not quotations.** Italicise a novel, play or film title; do not put it in quotation marks.
- **Never quote past the point of interest.** Four words you can analyse beat two lines you cannot.

Verbs that do work

"Shows" is not wrong. It is empty: it makes a claim so weak that it commits you to nothing. Every verb below makes a specific claim, which means it can be right or wrong — and that is exactly what makes it worth marks.

VERB	WHAT IT CLAIMS	USE WHEN
registers	the text records something without commenting on it	a detail carries feeling the character will not name
withholds	information is deliberately kept back	structure delays a revelation
undercuts	one element quietly cancels another	tone works against content
qualifies	a claim is narrowed, not denied	a clause takes back part of the sentence
concedes	ground is given to the other side	a writer admits a limitation before pressing on
narrows	a range of possibility shrinks	choices, vocabulary or hope contract over time
flattens	difference is reduced to sameness	repetition drains an image of force
isolates	something is cut off from context	a short sentence or a single figure stands alone
implicates	the reader is made complicit	the text puts you in an uncomfortable position
positions	the reader is placed at a set distance	narration controls sympathy
exposes	something hidden is made visible	a character's language betrays them
forecloses	an option is removed before it is taken	the ending was never available
rehearses	an action is repeated in preparation	an earlier scene previews a later one
tempers	an extreme is softened	humour or tenderness cuts a harsh scene
collapses	a distinction stops holding	two opposed ideas merge
recasts	the same thing is re-presented differently	a word changes what an event means

Two cautions. First, a strong verb you cannot justify is worse than "shows" — if you write that the text "implicates the reader", the next clause must say how. Second, avoid the technique-naming reflex: "the author uses juxtaposition to show" tells the marker what you can label, not what you can read. Name the effect, not the device.

WHERE THIS EARNS MARKS IN THE EXAM

The end-of-year VCE English examination has three sections of 20 marks each. Section A is an analytical response to a text and Section C is an analysis of the use of argument and language in an unseen persuasive text. Section C is assessed on analysis of the ways written and spoken language and visuals present an argument and persuade an intended audience — and the specifications state you will not be required to evaluate the relative merits or successes of the arguments. Embedded evidence is how you analyse rather than judge.

Frames that read as filler

Some sentence starters are worse than nothing, because they use the words a marker is watching for and deliver no reading. Retire these.

THE FIVE THAT COST YOU MOST

- **"This shows that..."** and **"This quote shows the reader that..."** — a sentence spent announcing that analysis is about to happen. Delete it and start with the analysis.
- **"The author uses the technique of ___ to show ___"** — device-spotting. It proves you have a glossary, not a reading.
- **"It is evident that"** / **"clearly demonstrates"** — if it were evident, you would not be arguing it. Certainty words are a substitute for evidence.
- **"This makes the reader feel ___"** — the reader is not a single person with one feeling. Say what the text positions the reader to think or notice, and how.
- **"In today's society"** / **"Throughout history, humans have..."** — an opening that could preface any essay on any text is an opening that says nothing about yours.

Three more habits that flatten otherwise good writing.

Frame-stacking. If four consecutive sentences all begin with a scaffold from section 3, the prose develops a hum. Use a frame where you are stuck, then write the next sentence in your own rhythm.

Quoting to prove the plot happened. Evidence that establishes what occurred, rather than how it is written, is retelling with quotation marks. Ask of every quotation: would I still need this if the marker had read the book yesterday?

The long quotation that does one word's work. If you quote twelve words and analyse two, cut to the two. Length is not evidence of engagement.

Ten minutes of practice

Do this with the text you are actually studying, tonight, with the book open.

1. Choose one paragraph you have already written. Find every quotation in it. Circle the ones that sit as their own sentence.

2. Cut each circled quotation to four words or fewer. Write the shortened version below.

3. Rewrite one of them as a single embedded sentence, using a frame from group B and a verb from section 5. Then delete the quotation marks and read it aloud to check the grammar holds.

4. Now write the same evidence a second time, using a frame from group C so the sentence reaches the author's intent rather than stopping at the effect.

5. Compare the two against your original paragraph. Count the sentences you saved. That space is where your next idea goes.

KEEP THIS PAGE BESIDE YOU

Nobody embeds evidence well by understanding the principle. You do it by rewriting the same four sentences enough times that the shape becomes automatic under timed conditions. Ten minutes a night for two weeks is enough.

Keep going.

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