

1. Your quotation needs a brief moment of context. Don't just lay it out there without briefly explaining where it came from and the situation from which it is being lifted. Here's what students sometimes do:

~~The author portrays Sheila as curious and spirited. 'She found herself wistfully wondering what he really looked like under that iron mask of fear.'~~

This would be better:

The author portrays Sheila as curious and spirited. When Sheila finally meets the Prince, the author describes her as 'wistfully wondering what he really looked like under that iron mask of fear' (p 27).

Notice I don't summarize: I just place it in the context that a reader would already recognize.

2. Quote only what you will analyze. If you want to look at what happened in a paragraph, paraphrase, including quoted words and phrases that are really important for the point you are making. Here's an example:

The significance of the motif of emptiness and loss is made more explicit in the climax of the novel, when Cassandra finds herself 'at a loss' about what she wants to do about the 'absence of understanding' about the text message from Miguel, who, she emphasizes, 'isn't anywhere close' to her – understood both literally and figuratively (p 81).

3. You need to follow the conventions of punctuation and syntax in your quotations.
 - a. You cannot separate a quotation from the sentence which comes before it with just a comma, like this:

~~An example can be found in line 35, 'Love is a monkey brain, terrible in leaf.'~~

That comma is not enough to separate these two, regardless of how long or short the quotation is. You probably want to use a colon: it's very useful for introducing and showing examples very briefly and clearly. Make the thing that comes before the colon is an independent clause: in other words, it could stand alone as a sentence. So this is correct:

An example can be found in line 35: 'Love is a monkey brain, terrible in leaf.'

The long dash can also be used, but it is less formal and should be used sparingly. Here's an example of its use:

The third stanza contains several images related to sandwich preparation – 'spreading thin' (27), 'slicing through' (34) and 'carefully layered' (42).

- b. If you use a verb to introduce a quotation, you need a comma.

But the lion says, 'Tomatoes are no use at all' (p 562).

Orpheus responds, 'Salt heals all wounds as well' (2034).

(Notice how 'says' and 'responds' are in the present tense; in writing about literature, everything within the text is stated in the present tense.)

- c. If you run a sentence and a quote together, the quote has to fit into the greater sentence. Here's a bad example that is quite common:

~~An example can be seen in act fifteen when Earnest tells Jenny that she is 'too beautiful to be believed. Really, it makes you seem inhuman to me somehow' (p 372).~~

See how the reference to 'you' and 'me' doesn't match the nouns in the original sentence? If the last sentence is needed, the quotation should be restructured to have it make sense.

- d. Inverted commas ['] are standard in British usage and quotation marks ["] are standard in American usage. Use the ones you like, but use them consistently.

For quotations within quotations, use the other mark. So here's the British:

'I couldn't believe it when she finally spoke. All she said was, "Aparagus.'" (p 43)

And here's the American:

"I couldn't believe it when she finally spoke. All she said was, 'Aparagus'" (p 43).

- e. Referencing should be done by page number for prose and line number for poetry. Shakespearean plays are by act, scene and line, like this: III.ii.123-45. In practice, the British keep the ending punctuation within the sentence and allow the reference to follow; American practice is to have the ending punctuation come after the reference. See the Asparagus examples above to see how that works.
- f. In poetry, indicate the end of a line with a forward slash: 'I drink the water / Of the spring of life' (24-25).
- g. If you make a change to a quote to have the grammar work better for you, put it in brackets. If the original said, 'I can say with some shame that I talked the whole time,' you can write,

Gerard admits that he was 'talk[ing] the whole time' (p 45).

4. Try to vary the way you handle quotations. Having every quotation start with 'An example is' lacks sophistication. You are using quotations to illustrate a point or prove something concrete to analyze. You don't need to announce that is your intention. In the following bit of analysis, the intention of the example is clear:

The author wants to show the effects of time on the various characters, and the use of clocks as a motif allows him to focus on that theme. When Sergeant Gruber tells Leticia what happened to Shaggy, he says, 'The parachute failing wasn't enough: the fact that he fell onto a sundial is what really killed him' (p 2). Here the author emphasizes...

If I had added 'An example of this is when,' it would have sounded less focused and more awkward.

5. If you are quoting a play with more than one speaker or more than two lines of poetry, block quote by putting the quotation on a new line and indenting all of the quoted lines. When block quoting, you need not use quotation marks. Here's an example:

When Alexander and his boyhood hamster meet for the first time after many years, they have an argument:

Bucky: Why did you always give me those pellets to eat? Didn't I deserve better?

Alexander: I thought you liked them! What am I, a hamster expert? (p 592)

Here we see Bucky identifying Alexander's greatest character flaw: his hubris.