Incorporating Quotations

The best way to persuade a reader that a work of literature does what you say it does is to provide textual evidence of your claims. That textual evidence comprises statements by the narrator/persona or characters in the work, even individual words used in particular ways. Following are some rules/guidelines to consider when using quotations in a literary analysis:

1. Quotations must be integrated smoothly.
This means that a quote you use in your paper must be worked comfortably into your own sentence structure.

Good Examples:

- Soon after meeting the peddler, Elisa "tore off the battered hat and shook out her dark pretty hair" (Steinbeck 197).
- After June's humiliating piano recital, Waverly adds insult to injury by declaring, "You aren't a genius like me" (Tan 151).

Bad Examples:

- Soon after meeting the peddler, Elisa starts to open up. "She tore off the battered hat and shook out her dark pretty hair" (Steinbeck 197).
- After June's humiliating piano recital, Waverly adds insult to injury. "You aren't a genius like me" (Tan 151).

Explanation:

- In the "bad" examples, the quotes are NOT integrated—instead, they are awkwardly plopped in the middle of the student's own writing.

2. If a quotation must be altered to fit your tense, clarify, or add a term/name/letter, just place brackets around the change.
Remember, quote marks tell your reader that the words inside them are EXACTLY the same as the original.

Examples:

- Referring to one of his co-workers, Sammy observes that "[Stokesie] thinks he's going to be manager some sunny day" (Updike 290).
- Dwight is a bully who takes out his anger and insecurity on those who are weaker than he is. While hunting, he boosts his ego by "kill[ing] anything he [sees]. He kill[s] chipmunks, squirrels, blue jays, and robins" (Wolff 171).

Explanations:

- In the first quote, the original text uses "he," but since his name isn't mentioned in the sentence, it's best to clarify this for the reader.
- The second quote shows more changes. The writer here changes the author's original words to maintain proper verb tense. This is indicated by the brackets.

3. If you wish to omit unnecessary information from the middle of a quote, use ellipsis.
These "three dots" are NOT necessary at the beginning or end of quotes—integrating means readers expect you'll omit words there. You only need to use these when words are omitted in the middle.

Examples:

- After the peddler leaves, Elisa "scrub[s] herself...until her skin was scratched and red" (Steinbeck 199), perhaps indicating her feelings of guilt following her intimacy with him.
- During their phone conversation, Toby's father tries to win Toby over by saying, "I've made some mistakes....We all have. But that's behind us. Right, Tober?" (211).

Explanations:

- In the first example, note the use of brackets around the single letter "s," it's necessary to make the verb "scrub" agree with the subject "Elisa" when changing from the past tense of the story to the present tense needed here. Also, the ellipsis shows that information is omitted from this specific quote, but the quote still makes sense.
- In the second example, the ellipsis has four "dots" rather than the normal three. This shows that not only was information eliminated from the original text, but also that more than one sentence was omitted.

4. Use single quote marks to indicate a quote within a quote.
When there are quotes within quotes, the quote you use gets double quotation marks and any quoted material in this quote receives single quotation marks.
Examples:

- Maggie believes "that 'no' is a word the world never learned to say to [Dee]" (Walker 341).
- When Lena shows Ying-Ying around her new house, Ying-Ying complains that "the slant of the floor makes her feel as if she is 'running down'" (Tan 163).

Explanations:

- In the first example, the word "no" is already in quotes, so it is placed in singe quotes to indicate that.
- In the second example, "running down" must have been in double quotes, but because the writer is quoting this bit of information, the double quotes get bumped to single quotes.

5. If you're having trouble integrating a quote, the colon is your friend.
The colon— : —is often used to introduce or integrate quotes. Keep the colon in mind if you cannot find an easy way to or place to mesh the quote with your own words. The colon is often used to integrate a block quote, as seen in the second example.
Examples:

- Though Wangero implies she understands the value of the quilts better than her mother, Mrs. Johnson knows much more about the quilts than Wangero does, including the way they were designed: "[o]ne was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain" (Walker 347).
- Lady Macbeth calls on supernatural powers so that she can assist in Duncan's murder:

> Come you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
> Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood.
> Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose. (*Macbeth* 1.5.47-53)

Explanations:

- The first example shows how to use a colon to integrate a short quote.
- The second example shows that colons are often used to integrate long quotes, too. This type of quote is a block quote—a quote of more than four lines of text. Long quotes are always set a part as block quotes, and a colon is a very good way to integrate them into the reset of the paper.