Using Quotations in Writing About Literature

Be sparing in your use of long quotations—prefer short quotations.

Use quotations as evidence, not padding.

1. Periods and commas always fit inside quotation marks.
   - Phoenix seems heroic as she waits, "silent, erect and motionless," like a knight in "armor."

2. Most other marks of punctuation (semi-colons, dashes, etc.) go outside.
   - Phoenix Jackson seems heroic as she waits, "silent, erect and motionless"; she impresses with a still dignity.

3. Question marks go inside if part of the quote, outside if your own question.
   - "Who are you watching?" Phoenix asks the buzzard.
   - Why does Phoenix say to the boy in her daydream, "that would be acceptable"?

4. When you want to leave out material within a quotation, use the ellipsis (3 spaced periods: . . .) If an omission concludes a sentence, use 4 periods (one for the final period).
   - We first see Phoenix "far out in the country . . . with her head tied in a red rag."
   - She was "coming along a path through the pinewoods. . . . She was very old and small."

5. Your quotations must make sense. Introduce any quotations you use in such a way that the reader knows what they are there for. The quotation must fit grammatically into your sentence.
   - A resourceful old lady, Phoenix walks through the woods with the aid of "a thin, small cane made from an umbrella."
   - Welty describes Phoenix’s skin as having "a pattern all its own," with a "a golden color" running underneath.
Don't refer to your quotations as quotations.

NO NO: As this quotation shows, Phoenix Jackson's skin had "a pattern all its own."

6. If you are quoting a passage that already includes quotation marks to indicate conversation, use double quotes ("') to pen and close your quotation, single marks (’) to indicate the author's quotation.

- Phoenix appeared both playful and shrewd as "she gave a little cry and clapped her hands and said, 'Git on away from here dog! Look! Look at that dog!'"

7. When, on occasion, you quote a passage of five or more lines of prose (three or more of poetry), triple space, indent about ten spaces, and then single space your quotation. Don't use quotation marks when you indent.

- Prose

She wore a dark striped dress reaching down to her shoe tops, and an equally long apron of bleached sugar sacks, with a full pocket: all neat and tidy, but every time she took a step she might have fallen over her shoe-laces which dragged from her unlaced shoes.

8. The simplest way to handle page references is to put them in parentheses after the quotation, inside the final mark of punctuation.

- Phoenix seems heroic as she waits, like a knight in "armor" (518).

9. Short works have their titles put in quotation marks.

- "A Worn Path" "Sonny's Blues" "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

Longer works—novels, textbooks, plays—have their titles underlined or italicized.

- **Moby Dick, Shogun, A Crash Course in Composition**