

The best proof that a work of literature does what you say it does is textual evidence: that is, words and sentences that you cite from the poem, story, or play you are writing about. If you say that a character in a story is evil, can you quote a passage in which a reliable character or narrator talks of his evil? Can you quote a passage which shows the character doing an evil act? The best support you have as you discuss a work of literature is the text of the work itself.

As you incorporate textual evidence into your discussion through the use of quotations, there are some rules you should keep in mind.

1. **Do not overuse quotations.** There should be many more of your own words than quotations in your discussion of the literary work.
2. **Incorporate quotations into your own sentences.** The style of your writing will be better if you incorporate quoted phrases into your own sentence structure than writing a sentence and then quoting a sentence or poetic line.

WEAK: Richard Cory was very polite. "He was a gentleman from sole to crown." Also he was good-looking, even regal-looking, "clean favoured and imperially slim."

BETTER: Richard Cory was polite, "a gentleman from sole to crown." Like a handsome king, he was "clean favoured and imperially slim."

3. **Avoid having two quotations in a row.** Your own words or commentary should bridge the two quotations.

WEAK: Richard Cory had everything going for him. "He was a gentleman from sole to crown." "And he was rich — yes, richer than a king."

BETTER: Richard Cory had everything going for him. The townsfolk referred to him as "a gentleman from sole to crown." As well, they were impressed that "he was rich—yes, richer than a king."

4. **Work the quotation comfortably into your own sentence structure.** Avoid making a quotation the subject of a verb in a sentence.

WEAK: "And he was always quietly arrayed" shows how elegant Richard Cory was.

BETTER: Richard Cory, "always quietly arrayed," was an elegant fellow.