Engaging with primary texts and sources

Here are some golden rules for citing from primary texts or other sources. Use this as a checklist for your next essay.

- Quote directly from the text if the style used or the way something is expressed is significant to your point.

- Do not quote if you are simply giving plot details.

- Quote or give a textual example to back up each point you make.

- Do not quote unless the material is directly related to your point, and only quote those phrases which are of relevance. Be economical and precise in your use of quotations.

- If you need to include a quotation of more than two lines, offset it by increasing the margins on both left and right. Otherwise, simply place the quotation in single inverted commas within the main body of the paragraph.

- Embed quotations within your own prose – this effectively means that they should form part of a longer sentence, often preceded by a comma or a colon.

- Explain who is speaking/give some kind of context for the quotation. Examples:
  - As Mario says of Julia, ‘...’
  - Marito’s sense of comedy is evident, particularly as he describes ‘el air cariñoso que adoptan los adultos cuando se dirigen a los idiotas y a los niños’.

- Do not simply leave a quotation to speak for itself – make explicit the point you are drawing out.

- The following should be italicized or underlined: titles of plays, novels, or critical works which represent the whole book in question. The following should be placed in single inverted commas: titles of poems, articles or short stories. The rule is that anything which is part of a larger work (e.g. an article in a journal, or a poem in a collection) goes in inverted commas; everything else is italicized or underlined.

- Make sure you know the capitalization rules for the language you are working in. English titles take capitals for all major words, but other languages have different rules.