Contextualizing Quotes
Although the point of using quotes in reporting qualitative research is to let the voice of the participants be heard, quotes can’t stand by themselves in isolation. If you’re including them in your research report, they need to be illustrative of your research findings, and they need an introduction from you which tells your reader how they illustrate that finding. So the format is:
- Say what the finding is
- Introduce the quote by saying who said it and in what context
- Give the quote
- Comment on the quote by comparing it to other quotes from the same person, other quotes from different people on the same topic, etc.

Reporting vs. Selecting
If you’ve transcribed your data, it’s tempting to get into a he-said-and-then-she-said kind of report of what went on in an interview, focus group, or observation. It’s not important to report everything that was said, or all the responses to each question you asked. It’s better to group responses by research question (RQ) and/or emerging theme.

Grouping quotes by RQ or Theme
Hopefully you’ve already read all your data and coded it according to either research question or theme. I.e., what data answered your research question? Did some common theme develop from the data?

Read the coded data again. Look for patterns among the quotes. Does everybody say the same thing? Make a table for yourself categorizing the responses people give and counting how many people say each. You want to be able to convey for your reader how much variance there is among the responses. You might want to put the table directly in your text.

When reporting your findings, use the table to write a summary statement about the RQ or theme. For example, “Ten principals said X, and five said Y.” Then put in a quote from your data. E.g., “A sample response from the ten principals was…. (insert quote).”

Using quotes to answer Research Questions
You can simply put a RQ as a subheading of your paper. For example, you could have the subhead, “How do principals use student data?” Then you’d give an introduction answering that RQ. You might insert the table you developed above to give your reader an overview of responses, or you might go through the most
common responses, with an example of each. For example, “There were three ways in which respondents said they’d use student data: X, Y, and Z.” Then you would give a quote illustrating each one.

**Using quotes to highlight themes**

You might find general themes in your data which overlap your RQs. For example, you might find that principals are ignoring student data and instead relying on teacher reports. Lead with a heading that indicates what the general trend is in the data. E.g., "Not Student Data, But Teacher Reports." Say something in about a paragraph about this finding. Then start introducing sample quotes.

**How to choose a quote from the many you have available**

When choosing quotes, choose either typical or especially poignant ones.

To write about typical quotes, give your reader a sense of what “typical” means. For example:

Of the twenty respondents, all but two said they would use student information in their screening process (refer reader to the table you made). A typical response was, (insert quote). This sample shows... (summarize and relate back to your research question). However, not everyone agreed with this response. Two (or whatever) respondents said instead that (quote) and (quote). These responses show that there is lack of agreement on this issue (or whatever) and so... (relate back to your research question or theme or finding).

You can also explain a general trend in the data and just give one quote as an example of that trend. For example:

Focus group data indicated that teachers were more interested in using data for other purposes, such as to determine students’ focus and distractibility. Said one, for example, “I think we could use it for organizing class lists.” And so on.

You can also choose quotes which are especially poignant. You will know these when you see them. They are evocative, pithy, image-filled, and grab the reader’s attention. All you as the researcher have to do is step in and explain how exactly that quote fits into whatever point you're making -- again, answering your research questions.