

Using Sources in Your Paper

Researching, quoting, and discussing sources effectively in your paper can be tricky, but outside sources can give your argument the support and credibility that are crucial to a strong paper. This handout will guide you through finding good sources, incorporating them into your paper, and using them to support your ideas.

Choosing Your Sources

Many different types of sources are available: web sites, books, magazines, newspapers, and journals. It is often tempting to make do with the first few sources you find on your topic. However, it is important to take the time to do thorough research and to consider sources carefully so that you can use the most relevant and reliable sources available.

Choose sources that do one or more of the following:

- Provide background information or context
- Explain terms or concepts
- Support your claims with evidence
- Lend authority to your argument
- Identify a gap or a contradiction in the conversation
- Anticipate and counter objections from *A Writer's Reference (AWR)* pp. 115-16, 126-31.

Remember: There is no such thing as the perfect source. If you are having trouble finding sources on your topic, you can explore related subjects and then draw connections between those arguments and yours. To evaluate the usefulness of your sources, a good strategy is to assign a grade to each one. If you were an instructor and your source were a paper, would you give it an A or maybe a B? Do not use sources that you would grade as a C or lower.

Incorporating Quotations into Your Writing

When you quote a source in your paper, it is as if you were inserting someone else's voice into your own monologue. If you do this without the proper integration, your writing will not flow smoothly and may not make sense to your audience. Be sure to introduce your sources properly before you quote—or even summarize or paraphrase—by using a strong signal phrase with the author's name and credentials, if available, and/or the title of the source. Incorporate quotations into your own sentences, keeping in mind that the grammar of the quotation needs to connect to the grammar of your sentence. *The Little, Brown Handbook*, 12th ed., gives the following examples of incorrect and correct use of quotations (642):

Awkward One editor disagrees with this view and “a good reporter does not fail to separate opinions from facts” (Lyman 52).

Revised One editor disagrees with this view, maintaining that “a good reporter does not fail to separate opinions from facts” (Lyman 52).

See “Integrating Sources” in *AWR* (MLA-3).

You also have the option of inserting your own change to a quotation by using square brackets [] to make it fit in with the grammar or meaning of your sentence. For example, “The tabloids [of England] are a journalistic case study in bad reporting,’ claims Lyman” (52).

Avoid inserting a quotation into your paper as a sentence that stands alone (also known as a “drop quote”). Quotations should be included in sentences that start with your own words. *LBH* (643) provides examples:

NO Many news editors and reporters maintain that it is impossible to keep personal opinions from influencing the selection and presentation of facts. “True, news reporters, like everyone else, form impressions of what they see and hear. However, a good reporter does not fail to separate opinions from facts” (Lyman 52).

YES Many news editors and reporters maintain that it is impossible to keep personal opinions from influencing the selections and presentation of facts. Yet not all authorities agree with this view. One editor grants that “news reporters, like everyone else, form impressions of what they see and hear.” But, he insists, “a good reporter does not fail to separate opinions form facts” (Lyman 52).

See *AWR* (MLA-3c) for more information on the use of signal phrases.

Placing Quotations in Context: Using P. I. E.

After you have chosen the most effective quotations to use and have smoothly incorporated them into your own writing, your work is not done. You also need to properly explain the significance of each quotation. Why is this statement or idea important? How does it relate to your argument? Your audience may not see the connection between the quotation and your argument, so do make it clear. Whenever you are incorporating a source into a paragraph, simply remember P.I.E.: point, illustration, explanation.

POINT: The point is the argument that you are trying to make in a particular paragraph. Before you use a quotation, state your point so that the audience will be familiar with the idea that your source supports. Stating your point prepares your audience for the quotation or paraphrase that follows.

ILLUSTRATION: The illustration is the quotation or paraphrase from your source that follows the point statement. Think of your source as providing evidence for your argument or point. Don’t quote a source unless you are sure that the quotation illustrates or supports your argument.

EXPLANATION: Your explanation is just that—an explanation of how the quotation you have just used relates to and supports your point. Never leave a quotation hanging; always follow it with an explanation of its relevance and importance to your argument.

The following is an example found in *LBH* (174-75):

The most fundamental and most debatable assumption underlying Sowell’s essay is that higher education is a kind of commodity that not everyone is entitled to. **[point]** In order to diminish the importance of graduates’ average debt from education loans, Sowell claims that a car loan will probably be higher (133). **[illustration]** This comparison between education and an automobile implies that the two are somehow equal as products and that an affordable higher education is no more a right than a new car is. **[explanation]**

For more examples, see our “Using P. I. E.” handout.