

Using Sources in Your Paper

Researching, quoting, and discussing sources effectively in your paper can be tricky, but it can give your argument the support and credibility that is 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

There are a lot of different sources out there—web sites on the Internet, books, articles in magazines, journals, and newspapers—and it is often tempting to simply make do with the first three or five sources that you find on your topic. It's important to take the time to do thorough research and to consider your sources carefully so that you can use the most relevant and reliable sources available.

You should choose sources that do one of the following:

- Give necessary background on your topic
- Set the precedent or establish a foundation for your argument
- Offer previous research or other opinions on your topic
- Answer your research question or provide the necessary links in the logic of your argument.

Remember that there's no such thing as the perfect source; if you are having trouble finding sources on your particular topic, it often helps to explore related subjects and then draw connections between their arguments and yours. You also need to continually evaluate the usefulness of your sources—there may be a more effective source that meets your paper's needs. It's also a good strategy to grade your sources—if you were the instructor and your source were a paper, would you give it an A, or maybe a B? You don't want to use sources that you would grade as a C or lower. If you do, chances are that this is the grade your paper will receive.

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 transition, 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 referring at least to the name of the author, if not the title of the source as well. 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* gives the following examples of correct and incorrect use of quotations on page 624:

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).

Remember that you also have the option of inserting your own grammatical changes to a quote in square brackets [] to make it fit in with the grammar of your sentence. For example:

“The tabloids [of England] are a journalistic case study in bad reporting,” claims Lyman (52).

Whatever you do, don’t simply insert a quotation into your writing as its own sentence or a sentence that stands alone (also known as a drop quote). Quotations need to be included in sentences that start with your own words. *The Little, Brown Handbook* provides examples on page 625:

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).

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

After you’ve chosen the most effective quotes to use and have smoothly incorporated them into your own writing, your work is not done. You also need to make sure to properly explain the significance of the quote. Why is this particular statement or idea important? How does it relate to your argument? Your audience may not see the connection between the quote and your argument, so you need to 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 statement that you are trying to make in a particular paragraph. Before you even use a quote, you need to state your point so that the audience will be familiar with the idea that your source is supposed to support. Stating your point prepares your audience for the quote that follows.

ILLUSTRATION: The illustration is the quotation or paraphrase of information from your source that follows the statement of your point. Think of your sources as proving or showing the evidence for your argument or point. You do not want to quote a source unless you are sure that the quote illustrates or supports your argument.

EXPLANATION: Your explanation is just that—an explanation of how the quotation you’ve just used relates to and supports your point. You should 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 *The Little, Brown Handbook*, page 628:

Kate Chopin builds irony into every turn of “The Story of an Hour.” **[point]** For example, Mrs. Mallard, the central character, finds joy in the death of her husband, whom she loves, because she anticipates “the long procession of years that would belong to her absolutely” (23). **[illustration]** One would not expect a woman who loves her husband to look forward to life without him. **[explanation]**