

Using Sources in Academic Writing

We use sources in our writing to:

- Strengthen our arguments and emphasize our points.
- Create a dialogue between ourselves and scholars (and between different scholars).
- Identify important themes and opinions related to our topic.
- Let the reader know where to find more information on a topic.
- Present statistics and figures from others' research.

Sources should not:

- Make our arguments for us. Sources should either support our argument or provide a counterargument that we will argue with in our paper. **Our writing should put forth our own voice and opinion, not the voices of others.**

Three ways to integrate sources into papers:

- Summarize: A summary is a brief account of the main ideas of a source written in your own words.
- Paraphrase: Paraphrasing restates a point from a source in your own words.
- Quote: A quotation uses the exact words from a source.

****With each of these ways, you must cite your sources! Failure to do so is plagiarism.****

Primary vs. Secondary Sources:

- Primary sources are produced at the same time that the events described in the source took place.
- Secondary sources were produced later and often analyze and evaluate primary sources.

How to assess a source:

- Look at the date of your source. Are you writing about a current issue? Is the source current enough?
- Is the source a primary or secondary one? Which type of sources do you need?
- Does the source come from a known author and publisher? Is the author a professor, clergy person, or a researcher?
- What is the source's major claim or thesis? What are its primary assumptions?
- Does the argument apply to your subject? (Look at the table of contents and index to get a better idea of the book's focus.)
- Is the source's argument supported by evidence?
- Is it objective or are wild claims made without evidence?
- Who is the audience (is the source trying to convert?)?
- Are there book reviews of the source and what do they say?

A few notes about using quotations:

- Attribute each quotation to its source and provide a citation.
- Provide context for and explain the significance of each quotation you use.
- Use quotations **only** when you need the author's actual wording. You might be discussing the language used or assessing a key part of their argument that can only be identified through a direct quotation.
- A quotation by itself is not a complete sentence. You must introduce a quotation (ex. Smith writes, "God is good all the time.") or incorporate part of a quotation into a sentence (ex. While Smith claims that God's being and actions are "good all the time," the Bible says differently.)
- Consult the appropriate style guide to determine how to format long quotations as block quotations. In general, Chicago Style considers 5 or more lines of prose (or 100 or more words) and 2 lines of poetry to constitute a block quotation. MLA Style considers 4 or more lines of prose and 3 lines of poetry to constitute a block quotation. Block quotations should only be used if you plan on analyzing them extensively; if not, you should just paraphrase or summarize the information (perhaps with a short quotation used as well).

Citing biblical texts:

When referring to a biblical text in a sentence, write out the full name of the book, then use numbers to show chapter and verse.

In Matthew 5:1-11, Jesus begins by focusing on...

Not: In Matthew chapter five verses one through eleven...

Not: In Matt. 5...

When quoting or paraphrasing a biblical text, give the proper reference in parentheses following the sentence. Use standard abbreviations and numbers.

The opening verses of John echo another beginning: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).

If your sentence already clearly indicates what book of the Bible you are discussing, then the parenthetical reference should provide whatever information is missing in the sentence...

The rhetorical high point of 1 Corinthians is the hymn to love (ch. 13).

The period always goes after the parenthetical reference at the end of the sentence.

ZSR Guide to Divinity Research: guides.zsr.edu/divinity.

Sources and Useful Resources

<https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/using_research

<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/>