

Integrating and Documenting Sources

Why should I incorporate outside sources?

Outside information can be an important part of your argument and there are many reasons to include it. It may be evidence that supports your argument or to illustrate a counterargument. It may also demonstrate your mastery of the research already done on the issue and to situate your position within an ongoing scholarly debate on the issue. You may also be using outside information to build your “ethos” as a credible source on the issue by situating your ideas within a conversation among experts on the issue. You might choose to include outside information simply because a quotation is particularly succinct, well-said or humorous. The incorporated material may take a variety of forms, like statistics, historical facts or even an expert’s opinion.

How should I incorporate outside sources?

Once you have decided that you want to mention an idea of another author, you are faced with the task of figuring out how you will integrate it into your own argument or analysis. Cited information may take the form of a short quotation, long or “block” quotations (more than four lines), or a summary or paraphrase (including figures or statistics pulled from a source). The most important thing to remember is that the reader (most likely your teacher) is more interested in hearing **your** ideas. Outside sources merely serve to help you develop your ideas and support them. **You should not place quotations, paraphrases, or summaries in such key locations of your paper as the thesis sentence or topic sentence of a paragraph.** Before you even decide to bring in the idea of another writer, think about why you are doing it.

Paraphrasing is what you will be citing most often, as readers want to hear **your voice**. It is a more active way of incorporating material from outside sources than direct quotation because it requires you to rephrase someone else’s statements in your own words. This method is one of the best ways for you to illustrate your understanding of the material. In order to paraphrase, you will have to think about a passage, understand its meaning, and translate that meaning into your own language. When you paraphrase in your essay, you **must** refer to the author of the idea you are including.

Summarizing is another way of incorporating material from outside sources that is more active than direct quotation because it requires you to pick out the main points of a passage, article, or book and restate these points using your own words. The purpose of a summary is to restate an idea given in someone else’s work in a much shorter form; you must determine the main points and share them with your reader, explaining how they fit together. When you incorporate a summary into your own essay, you **must** refer to the author of the idea you are including.

Direct quotation is copying a sentence or passage exactly as it appears and incorporating it into your own essay. Students often find it tempting to quote because it is easier than summarizing or paraphrasing. However, in general, **direct quotes should be used sparingly and only** when you have a good reason to do so. If you do use direct quotes, you can use short quotations when you want to highlight specific language. While long quotations should not be relied upon heavily as a general rule, there are some instances in which they may be appropriate (such as a literary analysis). Like paraphrasing and summarizing, direct quotes **must** be set off by quotation marks and refer to the author.

How should I incorporate direct quotations, if I decide to use them?

Even when you are ready to use a direct quotation in your paper, it is important to remember that **your words must be dominant**; you must always introduce a quotation in a way that tells the reader its connection to **your ideas**. Students are sometimes tempted to throw a piece of quoted material (or several quotes) into an essay without introducing it or commenting on it. The quotation is simply sprinkled in, like a crouton in a salad, without being blended into the writer's own words. Instead, the words used to introduce a quotation should suggest the relationship between your own ideas and the statement you are about to quote. You should examine the quote before using it in order to define the way in which an author makes a point.

There are a number of models that can be used to build sentences that effectively integrate your borrowed material. When an author makes strong claims, it can be helpful to use a direct quote, introduced by forms such as, [author] **claims/argues/state/asserts/maintains** that [quotation or paraphrase]. Similarly, when an author makes weaker claims, this form is useful to refer to material that an author advances in a more tentative manner: [author] **suggests that** [quotation or paraphrase]. Lastly, it is important to link quotations to the points they are being used to support. Here are three very basic ways to do this: [your point about, or restatement of, author's claim X]. **Thus/For example/For instance** [author] [argues/suggests] that [quotation re: claim x].

Which citation conventions should I use?

Once you figure out what outside material you want to use and how you plan to incorporate, you need to determine which citation convention you will use. The documentation conventions of the Modern Language Association (MLA style) are typically used when writing academic papers in the arts. In social sciences, the documentation conventions of the American Psychological Association (APA style) are generally the preferred citation conventions. When submitting a paper for publication, the documentation conventions of the Chicago Manual of Style (Chicago style) are the most common. In the field of journalism, the documentation conventions of the Associated Press (AP style) are generally preferred. Regardless, you should make sure you know which your professor prefers and if you have the choice, be consistent. Pick a citation convention and stick to it. For specific details, refer to the style guide you are using.