How to Use Sources in Writing

The Writing Center
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When a source has information that you need to incorporate in your own writing, there are three ways to integrate this outside information. **All three of these strategies require that you cite where you got the information.**

1. Summary

You can summarize a lot of information from a source in your own words, and then cite where the information came from. Summarizing is useful when you want to give an overview of a source, or if you want to use the main idea and not the specific words of the author.

Be sure to make your summary as accurate as possible. For example:

Source: "Traveling across the continent, Roth got to know his companion, Bill Clay, so thoroughly that he soon grew to regret the arrangement. No man is a hero to his chauffeur, and long before he had finished driving them both to California, Roth recognized that the roughhewn comrade he had idealized as a man of iron was really a boorish, selfish individual. Clay had sent his wife and children ahead by bus, and the Model A crammed with his household belongings and Roth's books could barely manage 35 miles per hour on the primitive dirt roads that, in October 1938, carried the two men west." – from *Redemption*, Kellman, p. 165

Summary: When in 1938 Roth traveled cross-country with Bill Clay, whom he had once idolized, their difficult and unpleasant journey made Roth grow to dislike the man (Kellman 165).

2. Paraphrase

Unlike summary, paraphrasing involves **faithfully conveying a very specific piece of information from a source,** just not in the exact words of the author. For example:

Source: "No man is a hero to his chauffeur, and long before he had finished driving them both to California, Roth recognized that the roughhewn comrade he had idealized as a man of iron was really a boorish, selfish individual." – from *Redemption*, Kellman, p. 165

Paraphrase: Before Roth and Clay reached California, Roth had begun to see Clay as an unsophisticated and unpleasant man (Kellman 165).

3. Direct Quote

The most direct way to incorporate external material is to **quote the exact words that another author wrote**.

When you incorporate a direct quote into your writing, it's important to incorporate the external author's ideas into your own. Other thinkers' ideas should be used to build and support your own—so your own words should make it clear why you're quoting someone else.

• Embedding Quotes •

Before quoting, establish the point you're making. Use the quote to support your own point, not to make a point for you.

Embed the quote in your own sentence; don't leave quotes "floating" without context.

- A well-embedded quote is folded into your own sentence as though the words were your own. The ideas and the grammar will be seamless. For example:

> The topic is important, said Judge Posner, who wrote about psychology and the law in his recent book, *Frontiers of Legal Theory,* but he doubts whether "cognitive psychology or even rational choice theory has the tools to make much progress in the understanding of judicial psychology."
>
> – from "Judicial Reasoning Is All Too Human," Cohen

After quoting, finish with your own words again, to sandwich your quote and let your reader know what they're expected to understand from it. For example:

> From the Joyce who wrote *Ulysses*, Roth derived the inspiration to forge sophisticated fiction out of the tawdry material of his own domestic experience, the lesson "that I could talk about urban squalor and develop it into a work of art." Joyce's example gave Roth the confidence to extract straws from his banal existence and turn them into literary gold.
>
> – from *Redemption*, Kellman, 128-9

When you're incorporating quotes into your own writing, you'll often have to tweak the quotes to make them fit into your own sentence structure. There are two main tools for doing this.

- **Brackets –** When you're adding your own words or replacing words from the original text, indicate that the words aren't the original author's using brackets [ ].

- **Ellipses –** When you're removing a portion of the source material, you indicate the absence using an ellipsis […]. This is not necessary at the beginning or end of quoted material, even if you've left off parts of the original sentence. For example:

> **Source:** How does an artist look at the world? First, you figure out what's worth stealing, then you move on to the next thing. That's about all there is to it. When you look at the world this way, you stop worrying about what's "good" and what's "bad"—there's only stuff that's worth stealing, and stuff that's not worth stealing. Everything is up for grabs.
>
> – from *How to Steal Like an Artist*, Kleon, 6
>
> **Quote**: According to poet Austin Kleon, the way creativity works is that "First, [artists] figure out what's worth stealing… Everything is up for grabs" (Kleon 6). Creativity builds on art that already exists, and artists then do something new with the material that's already there.