

Incorporating Sources



Properly incorporating sources such as **direct quotations, summaries, paraphrases, research data, graphs, and images** will help you avoid plagiarism, provide evidence to back up your claims, build your credibility, and establish your argument in the critical conversation of your topic. Although you should consult the correct style guide (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) for information on formatting different sources, meeting specific guidelines, and citing properly, this handout will give a basic overview of how to incorporate textual sources into your writing.

Introducing Sources

Introduce your sources to signal to readers that information is not your own. Two useful ways to introduce sources are presenting the speaker and contextualizing quotations, summaries, or paraphrases.

Presenting the Speaker

Show readers why the speaker of the source is an authority on the subject. This will build the credibility of your work.

Example: Mark Twain, American humorist and author, said, “Honesty is the best policy—when there is money in it.”

Contextualizing the Quotation

Give your reader the context of the quotation. By explaining the context, you can indicate its significance in the existing conversation.

Example: At the annual banquet of Eastman College, Mark Twain said, “Honesty is the best policy—when there is money in it.”

Partial Quotations

A quotation does not need to be a complete sentence. You can select just a few powerful words from your source and weave them into your writing. This technique allows you to retain your sentence structure and individual voice.

Example: In his speech to Eastman College, Mark Twain told the alumni that he believed in honesty but only “when there is money in it.”

When using partial quotation, be careful not to misrepresent or misinterpret the author’s original idea. Do not shorten a full quotation if it changes the speaker’s intended meaning.

Incorrect: Mark Twain believed, “Honesty is the best policy.”

This partial quotation is incorrect because it misrepresents Mark Twain’s original statement about honesty.

Altering Quotations for Clarity

In most cases you can change the tense of a quotation to match the tense of your sentence by setting any altered words or information within brackets. You may also use brackets to add information in your own words in order to clarify your point.

Typically you also use ellipses to account for any omitted material within your quotation. You do not need to put ellipses at the beginning or end of quotations. To correctly use an ellipsis, insert three periods with a space before and after each period where you have omitted any part of the quote.

Example: Mark Twain believed in “honesty . . . when there [was] money in it.”

Always be sure to consult with the style guide you are using to make sure it adheres to these guidelines.

Summarizing

Summarizing provides a condensed version of the key points from the original source. It is useful to use when you have a long passage with lots of important information.

Example: Mark Twain said that honesty was best when profitable.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing restates the main ideas in your own words at about the same length and level of detail as the original source. Be sure to capture the original tone as well.

Example: Mark Twain believed being truthful was useful when it offered profit.

Analyzing Sources

The most important element of using a source is providing analysis. Such analysis makes a clear connection between the cited material and the purpose of your paper. Never use so many quotations in your writing that it becomes a collection of someone else’s ideas. You should be the primary speaker in your paper. The following table provides strategies for improving the analysis of sources in your writing:

Do	Don't
Explain how the source supports your argument	Simply repeat the quotation in different words
Tell your reader what to understand from the source	Assume your source will speak for itself
Comment directly on the source and its relation to your topic	Comment only on your topic in general

Twain, Mark. "Business." *Mark Twain's Speeches*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910. 341-344. Print.