



An Introduction to College Writing Tutorial III: Working with Sources

This handout is a companion to the third video tutorial in the Hixon Writing Center's "Introduction to College Writing" series. You can use this handout in a variety of ways: it can serve as a space to take additional notes while watching the video, it can help you refresh your memory of the video, or it can be used as a standalone resource because it closely replicates the video's logic and information. Like the rest of our "Introduction to College Writing" series, this resource will probably be most useful to writers who are new to the demands of college-level academic writing.

WHY USE OTHER WRITERS' WORK?

As Kenneth Burke famously says in *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, entering academic discourse is like wading into a discussion at a crowded party: "You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar" (qtd. in Harris 110). While the romantic image of the lonely genius working in his garret room has the power of capturing our imaginations, it does not capture the reality of academic work. No matter how revolutionary the concept, it is always built on a larger conversation. And, that dynamic is reflected in the way we approach academic writing. We are always working with the ideas of others, and it is crucial that we show those interactions and influences to our readers as transparently as possible.

HOW DO I INCORPORATE OTHERS' IDEAS INTO MY WRITING?

- **Quote:** When you quote, you preserve the source's exact words. But, as Joseph Harris puts it in *Rewriting*, "You don't quote from a text to explain what it means in some neutral or objective way. *You quote from a text to show what your perspective on it makes visible*" (20; italics in original).
- **Paraphrase:** Instead of preserving a source's exact words, a paraphrase changes the words but preserves the logic and ideas of the original source.
- **Summarize:** A summary preserves the core ideas of a text but changes the original source's words and structure.

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON PITFALLS, AND HOW CAN I AVOID THEM?

(1) The "Floating Quote"

- **What is it?** "*They Say / I Say*" argues that "quotations are orphans: words that have been taken from their original contexts and that need to be integrated into their new textual surroundings" (43). When quotes are not integrated into their new surroundings, they can feel awkward and out of place for the reader. There are many labels for this lack of integration: some people call these "floating quotes," while others refer to them as "hit-and-run quotations," "dangling quotes," or "crouton quotes." Regardless of the term, the message is the same: a quote that is dropped into a new context without being introduced and explained by the writer is a stumbling block for the reader and should be avoided.
- **How do I fix it?** Once you have found a quotation you want to use, it is important that you frame it with an introduction and an explanation. The introduction "should

explain who is speaking and set up what the quotation says,” while the explanation “should explain why you consider the quotation to be important and what you take it to say” (Graff, et al. 46). By “sandwiching” your quote between an introduction and an explanation, you are ensuring that the quote’s role in its new context will make sense to your reader.

(2) The Evidence Pile

- **What is it?** This can happen when you give your reader a laundry list of all the evidence that supports your point. However, simply piling up your evidence will not serve your argument because it will leave the reader wondering *why* you needed to include all of this evidence.
- **How do I fix it?** Tell your reader what purpose your evidence serves and how it relates to your larger project. It is not enough to simply list off your evidence; you must tell your reader what it means and why it is important to your project.

(3) The Overuse of Block Quotes

- **What is it?** We’ve all experienced the temptation. It’s 4 a.m. We’re on page 8 of a 10-page paper that is due at 8 am. We’re exhausted. Our eyes ache, and our back is sore. The coffee from 15 minutes ago hasn’t kicked in yet. Then, we see a juicy block quote that would fill at least half of a page. Do we include it? The answer is a resounding no. Quotes should *only* be used if the exact wording is essential to the argument. Academic readers will not be fooled by this attempt to fill up a page quickly.
- **How do I fix it?** In most cases, it is preferable to extract key parts of the quote and integrate those pieces into a discussion of the source that is couched in your own words. Why is this better? More often than not, there are only a few moments in the larger quote that are really critical to your argument. Having said this, block quotes do exist for a reason, and you should not be afraid to use them if your argument truly necessitates a longer quote.

Works Cited

Graff, Gerald, et al. *“They Say / I Say”*: *The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing, with Readings*. 3rd ed., W.W. Norton & Company, 2015.

Harris, Joseph. *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*. Utah State UP, 2006.

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