

# Blending Source Material with Your Own Work

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn several methods for effectively integrating source material into your research essay. Specifically, this lesson will focus on:

## 1. Developing Your Assertions

Academic writing requires authors to connect information from outside sources to their own ideas in order to establish credibility and produce an effective argument. However, when working with sources, many students worry they are simply regurgitating ideas that others formulated.

That is why it is important for you to develop your own assertions, organize your findings so that your own ideas are still the thrust of the paper, and take care not to rely too much on any one source, or your paper's content might be controlled too heavily by that source.

In practical terms, some ways to develop and back up your assertions include:

1. *Blend sources with your assertions.* Organize your sources before and as you write so that they blend, even within paragraphs. Your paper—both globally and at the paragraph level—should reveal relationships among your sources and should also reveal the relationships between your own ideas and those of your sources.
2. *Write an original introduction and conclusion.* As much as is practical, make the paper's introduction and conclusion your own ideas or your own synthesis of the ideas inherent in your research. Use sources minimally in your introduction and conclusion.
3. *Open and close paragraphs with originality.* In general, use the openings and closing of your paragraphs to reveal your work—"enclose" your sources among your assertions. At a minimum, create your own topic sentences and wrap-up sentences for paragraphs.
4. *Use transparent rhetorical strategies.* When appropriate, outwardly practice such rhetorical strategies as analysis, synthesis, comparison, contrast, summary, description, definition, hierarchical structure, evaluation, hypothesis, generalization, classification, and even narration. Prove to your reader that you are thinking as you write.

Also, you must clarify where your own ideas end and the cited information begins. Part of your job is to help

your reader draw the line between these two things, often by the way you create context for the cited information.

### IN CONTEXT

What follows is an excerpt from a political science paper that clearly and admirably draws the line between writer and cited information:

*The above political upheaval illuminates the reasons behind the growing Iranian hatred of foreign interference; as a result of this hatred, three enduring geopolitical patterns have evolved in Iran, as noted by John Limbert. First . . .*

Note how the writer begins by redefining her previous paragraph's topic (political upheaval), then connects this to Iran's hatred of foreign interference, then suggests a causal relationship and ties her ideas into John Limbert's analysis—thereby announcing that a synthesis of Limbert's work is coming. This writer's work also becomes more credible and meaningful because, right in the text, she announces the name of a person who is a recognized authority in the field. Even in this short excerpt, it is obvious that this writer is using proper citation and backing up her own assertions with confidence and style.

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## 2. Paraphrasing and Quoting

**Paraphrasing** and **quoting** are both ways that an author can integrate sources. The two methods are closely related, and therefore, can sometimes be confused with one another.

Quoting borrows the exact wording used in a source and is indicated by placing quotation marks around the borrowed material.

Paraphrasing, on the other hand, borrows an idea found in a shorter passage but communicates this idea using different words and word order. While it is acceptable to loosely follow a similar structure, paraphrasing requires more than simply changing a few of the original words to synonyms.

Both paraphrasing and directly quoting have their merits, but they should be used at different times for different purposes. An author chooses to use one of these strategies depending on why the source is being used and what information the source provides.



### TERMS TO KNOW

#### **Paraphrasing**

Restating a passage in one's own words, keeping the author's original intent and meaning.

#### **Quoting**

Repeating the exact words of a piece of writing, using quotation marks to surround the quoted material.

### 2a. When to Paraphrase

Paraphrasing provides an author the opportunity to tailor the passage for the purpose of their own essay,

which cannot always be done when using a direct quotation.

Paraphrasing should be used to:

1. Further explain or simplify a passage that may be difficult to understand. It could be that the topic, such as the process of extracting stem cells, is particularly difficult to follow, or that the author has used language that further complicates the topic. In such situations, paraphrasing allows an author to clarify or simplify a passage so the audience can better understand the idea.
2. Establish the credibility of the author. In connection to the above point, paraphrasing a complicated passage can help the author establish trust with their audience. If an author directly quotes a difficult passage without analysis or further explanation, it may appear that they do not understand the idea. Paraphrasing not only clarifies the idea in the passage but also illustrates that the writer, since they can articulate this difficult message to the reader, is knowledgeable about the topic and should be trusted.
3. Maintain the flow of the writing. Each author has a unique voice, and using direct quotations can interrupt this voice. Too many quotations can make an essay sound choppy and difficult to follow. Paraphrasing can help communicate an important idea without interrupting the flow of the essay.
4. Eliminate less relevant information. Since paraphrasing is written using the author's own words, they can be more selective about which information from a passage is included or omitted. While an author should not manipulate a passage unnecessarily, paraphrasing allows an author to leave out unrelated details that would have been part of a direct quotation.
5. Communicate relevant statistics and numerical data. A lot of times, sources offer statistical information about a topic that an author may find necessary to developing their own argument. For example, statistics about the percentage of mothers who work more than one job may be useful to explaining how the economy has affected child-rearing practices. Directly quoting statistics such as this should be avoided.

## 2b. When to Quote

Direct quotations should be used sparingly, but when they are used, they can be a powerful rhetorical tool. As a rule, avoid using long quotations when possible, especially those longer than three lines.

When quotations are employed, they should be used to:

1. Provide indisputable evidence of an incredible claim. Directly quoting a source can show the audience exactly what the source says so there is not suspicion of misinterpretation on the author's part.
2. Communicate an idea that is stated in a particularly striking or unique way. A passage should be quoted if the source explains an idea in the best way possible or in a way that cannot be reworded. Additionally, quoting should be used when the original passage is particularly moving or striking.
3. Serve as a passage for analysis. If an author is going to analyze the quotation or passage, the exact words should be included in the essay either before or following the author's analysis.
4. Provide direct evidence for or proof of an author's own claim. An author can use a direct quotation as evidence for a claim they make. The direct quotation should follow the author's claim and a colon, which indicates that the following passage is evidence of the statement that precedes it.
5. Support or clarify information you've already reported from a source. Similar to the above principle, an author can use a direct quotation as further evidence or to emphasize a claim found in the source. This strategy should be used when an idea from a source is particularly important to an author's own work.
6. Provide a definition of a new or unfamiliar term or phrase. When introducing a term that is coined by the source's author or that is unfamiliar to most people, use a direct quotation to show the exact meaning of

the word or phrase according to the original source.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how to blend information from your sources with your own words and ideas. One of way of doing that is by **developing your assertions** with support from your research. Other methods for source integration include **paraphrasing and quoting**. You learned **when to paraphrase** and **when to quote** based on the needs of your essay.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This content has been adapted from Lumen Learning's "Blending Source Materials with Your Own Work" and "When to Quote and When to Paraphrase" tutorials.



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