

Incorporating Sources



Properly incorporating sources will help you build credibility, avoid plagiarism, provide evidence to back up claims, and establish your argument within the larger conversation on your topic. This handout provides a basic overview of how to incorporate textual sources into your writing, but always consult a style guide (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) for specific citation guidelines.

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 the material.

Presenting the Speaker

To build your own credibility, explain why the source is an authority on the subject.

Example: Mark Twain, American humorist and author, said, “Honesty is the best policy—when there is money in it” (33).

Contextualizing the Material

Give your reader the context of the quotation. Context may include noting the context in which material was developed and distributed or its context within the larger, existing conversation.

Example: At the annual banquet of Eastman College, Mark Twain said, “Honesty is the best policy—when there is money in it” (33).

Example: Honesty and financial outcomes have long been point of discussion within American society (Twain 33; Bhide and Stevenson 121)

Using Partial Quotations

Quotations do not need to be complete sentences. Select a few powerful words from your source and weave them into your writing. This allows for consistency in tone and style throughout your writing.

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” (33).

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” (33).

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

Altering Quotations for Clarity

Brackets can often be used to change the verb tense of a quotation or to add information to clarify an idea. Ellipses signal omitted material within a quotation, but not omitted material at the beginning or end of quotations. To correctly use an ellipsis, insert three periods with a space before and after each period.

Example: Mark Twain believed in “honesty . . . when there [was] money in it” (33).

Always consult with a style guide to make sure your altering of quotations adheres any specific guidelines.

Summarizing

Summarizing provides a condensed version of the key points from the original source. It is useful when you want to incorporate a long passage that has a lot of important information.

Example: Mark Twain said that honesty was best when profitable (33).

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is restating the main ideas in your own words at about the same length and level of detail as the original source.

Example: Mark Twain believed being truthful was useful when it offered profit (33).

Analyzing Sources

In addition to introducing sources, an important part of incorporating sources is providing analysis or making a clear connection between the cited material and the purpose of your paper. While using sources adds to the credibility of your writing, your work should typically be more than a compilation of sources. Ideally, sources should be used to **supplement and support your own ideas**. The following table provides strategies for improving your analysis of sources:

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

Works Cited

Twain, Mark. *The Wit and Wisdom of Mark Twain: A Book of Quotations*. New York: Dover Publications, 1998.

Bhide, Amar, and Howard Stevenson. "Why Be Honest If Honesty Doesn't Pay?" *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 68, no. 5, 1990, pp. 121–29.