

A Basic Guide to Using Sources

Outside sources can enrich papers and other assignments by providing evidence and improving credibility. Including data, facts, expert opinion, and quotations is an expected part of writing college-level papers; however, incorrect use of sources can lay one open to charges of plagiarism. I want you to feel confident that you can use sources when you need to. As far as I'm concerned, it's less important to get the citations perfect than to give credit every time, separate your language from another writer's language, and generally avoid plagiarism. It's best to learn the basic rules before embarking on any use of sources, even a seemingly simple use. Let's start here.

"If you didn't write it, you must cite it."

*Always distinguish your words from someone else's.

1. Use signal phrases to introduce quotations
2. Use quotation marks around borrowed language

*Always credit borrowed ideas including data, expert opinion, and facts, even if you've put the ideas into your own words.

1. In-text citations should link the borrowed idea or data to a source on your works cited page.

*Translations, paraphrases, and summaries must be cited.

Basic Guidelines

We use a system of citations to give credit to authors whose works have helped us produce our papers. In our class, we'll use Modern Language Association guidelines. There are two parts to the system. In the body of the paper, signal phrases, quotation marks (when needed), and page numbers or paragraph numbers make up an in-text citation. These in-text citations allow the reader to figure out which parts of the paper have come from which outside source. At the end of the paper, a list of works cited (called references in the APA system) is added. The works cited page gives readers enough information to find the books, websites, articles, or other items used as sources. Together, these two parts give appropriate credit to outside sources.

In-text citations look like this.

Type 1:

John Krakauer writes, "Like not a few of those seduced by the wild, McCandless seems to have been driven by a variety of lust that supplanted sexual desire" (66).

or this

Type 2:

According to John Krakauer, Chris McCandless spent his spring in Carthage, South Dakota studying up on the skills he would need during his stay in Alaska. He asked serious hunters for advice about how to hunt and skin animals, and how to cure meat (66-67).

or this

Type 3:

John Krakauer describes Chris McCandless as a wily survivor who got in over his head.

In your group, label the types as summary, paraphrase, or quotation. Then, label the parts of the in-text citation.

