

## 4. Using Sources in Academic Writing

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In the previous chapters, you've reviewed some important concepts about composition, thought a little bit about the concept of humor, and begun to see how you might start writing about this subject by exploring your own sense of humor. Now, it's time to think about how we're going to use this subject to develop our composition and research skills and to think critically about humor in our lives and the world. In this chapter, we will discuss using sources in our writing.

Most college writing involves using sources in some way. In this chapter, we will discuss different types of sources, why we use sources in our writing, and how to effectively incorporate and identify sources in your compositions.

### Types of Sources

In general, researchers classify sources into two types: primary sources and secondary sources. **Primary sources** are original texts and first-hand accounts of events or research. These may include things like literary texts (poems, plays, stories, etc.), films, works of art, interviews, original research, and original data. In this class, for example, the works of philosophy included in the "Understanding Humor: Why do we Laugh?" section of this book are primary sources. Another type of primary source might be a *Tiktok* video or a stand-up comedy routine or a film or an experience you've had that you found humorous.

**Secondary sources**, on the other hand, are sources that are about primary sources and/or offer interpretation and analysis. These include most academic journal articles, books on various subject, and any source that is looking at other sources and synthesizing, analyzing, or interpreting them. The articles included in the "Thinking Deeply About Humor: Why Does Laughing Matter?" section of this book are secondary sources that use theory and philosophy to analyze texts and make arguments. Along with that, most of the research that you do in this class and beyond will involve reading and working with secondary sources that report on subjects and offer you various ways of interpreting and analyzing the subject at hand.

### Why we use Sources

There are many reasons to use and require the use of sources in college writing, but they all come down to one simple truth: the more ways in which you can look at a subject, the better your understanding of it will be. College education in general seeks to expose us to a world of ideas beyond what we may have learned already in order to help us get a deeper, fuller picture of whatever it is we're studying. Using primary and secondary

sources allows us to do exactly that. When we consider others' experiences and ideas, we add depth to our own understanding of a topic and begin to see it more critically and objectively.

Think about what it's like to try on glasses. For those of you who need glasses to see, you understand what it's like to put on a pair of lenses and suddenly see the world clearly. For those of you who don't need glasses, chances are you've tried on a friend or family member's before and suddenly been overwhelmed by what the world looks like with a different set of lenses—a different perspective or way of seeing. When we engage with sources, this is exactly what we are doing. Instead of just accepting our own account of a subject, we are trying on other ways of seeing, and as we try on more and more perspectives, our understanding of the subject will become more complete. It may sometimes get a little blurry and give us a headache, but seeing things in new ways will always broaden our perspective.

As you work your way through the "Understanding Humor: Why do We Laugh?" section of this book and your own research this semester, think about what you're doing as trying on new lenses and seeing humor in new and interesting ways. No one source we read will give you all the answers; no one theory can explain all humor; but the more we consider, the more complete our understanding becomes.

## Paraphrase, Summary, and Quotation

When using sources in writing, there are three important strategies that you'll need to master: paraphrasing, summarizing, and quoting.

**Paraphrasing** involves putting information from a source into your own words. Often, this will be done in a slightly shorter or similar amount of words to the original source. When paraphrasing, you are attempting to take what someone else says and say it in a way that is clear for your readers in the context of your essay. We often paraphrase when a source is particularly difficult to read or needs to be put in modern terms, and when we want to make sure a point is clear for our reader so we repeat it "in other words."

**Summarizing** involves condensing a source down to its most important and essential ideas. When we summarize, we are taking a large amount of information and shortening it to focus only on the ideas that are necessary for the points we're making. We do this in writing to give our readers a quick sense of complex sources, to provide context for our use of sources, and to provide a quick snapshot of what we've learned in a manageable way for our readers.

**Quoting** involves using the exact words of the source and presenting them as they were originally written or said using quotation marks. When we quote, we do so because we want to emphasize the importance of an original idea or phrasing and lend a degree of credibility to our use of sources by showing that we know exactly what they say.

It's important to understand all of these ways of incorporating sources into our writing, but we should also be aware that we very rarely separate them in our college compositions. While you may sometimes have a specific assignment that asks you to simply summarize a source (an Annotated Bibliography, for example), often when you are using sources in your writing, you will use a blend of all three of these strategies to make sure that your writing is clear and your readers fully understand what your sources say and how you are using them.

## Putting it all Together

To effectively use a source in our writing, we want to make sure we follow a few guidelines, and develop a few habits that will make sure we're always using sources ethically, accurately, and clearly in our essays.

### **Guidelines**

Guideline 1: Always identify your sources clearly in your essay. When you use a source, you must identify it by author and/or title (sometimes authors aren't available) clearly in the text of your essay.

Guideline 2: Always cite your sources according to the appropriate citation style. Follow guidelines for MLA format found here: [Purdue OWL MLA Guidelines](#). Follow guidelines for APA format found here: [Purdue OWL APA Guidelines](#).

Guideline 3: All citations include in-text citation and end-of-text citations. Whichever citation style you are using, be sure that it is always clear which in-text citations correspond to which end-of-text citations.

### **Habits**

Habit 1: Always provide context for the sources you're using. Summarize major points so that readers know what the source was about and how they developed the points you're taking from them.

Habit 2: Use signal phrases to identify your sources in the text of your essay and to introduce any quotations. Signal phrases identify sources and provide readers with a "signal" that what follows is taken from another source. Signal phrases include things like "According to \_\_\_\_\_..." or "\_\_\_\_\_ argues that ..." or "\_\_\_\_\_ claims ...".

Habit 3: Follow any quotations with the phrase "in other words," then paraphrase the quotation in your own words, highlighting how it relates to your essay and ideas. It's often not enough to simply include a quotation. Most of the time, you also need to paraphrase and explain that quotation so that readers really know how that other writer's words fit into your composition. The best way to make sure you do this is to get in the habit of following quotations with "in other words" and a paraphrase. (You can always go back and delete the "in other words" phrase later if you find that you're using it too much or getting repetitive)

Following these guidelines and developing these habits will make sure that when you use sources in your essay, you're not just dropping them in and hoping that it makes sense. By identifying and citing sources as well as using summary, paraphrase, and quotation effectively, you will make sure that your reader always knows where information is coming from, what it says, and how you're using it. Not only will this make your essays longer and more academic, but it will make them clear and engaging for readers. For an example of how we do all this when writing about humor and using this book, read the sample essay in the next chapter which revises the sample essay from the previous chapter using multiple sources accurately and appropriately.