

# USING AND CITING SOURCES

You use sources in academic writing not just to show you've "done your homework," but also to show that you are able to take part in a "conversation" with others who have researched and written about the same issues. When you draw on the words and ideas of other people in this academic conversation, you cite them in order to give them credit for what they contributed to your argument, as well as to help others reading your work locate your source material if they would like to learn more. It's easy to copy down interesting quotations and to make notes of important facts and figures; it's often harder to integrate this information from others into your own writing. Remember that, ultimately, you want your reader to focus on **your** ideas and arguments rather than feel as if they're reading a summary of things other people have said.

## Direct Quotations

First, use direct quotations sparingly. Adding long (or even short) word-for-word passages from other people's writing dilutes the impact of your own ideas, and the interruption of these quotations almost always makes writing seem choppy.

Use direct quotations **only when**

- The original language is particularly creative or vivid
- The terminology used must be exact and accurate
- The person quoted must explain his or her position in his or her own words
- The person quoted is an authority on the subject **and** is using vivid or technical language

If you do use a direct quotation, **you must**

- **Not** "drop" or "plunk" the quotation into the middle of your own words  
*Ex.* I am proposing a radical change to the drug laws in this country. "The nation cannot continue to fill its prisons with nonviolent offenders at the expense of millions of lives lost in the maze of the rehabilitation and criminal justice industries." Congress must act now.
- **Not** follow one direct quotation with another  
*Ex.* Drug laws must change in this country: "If we don't act now, nonviolent offenders will outnumber death-row inmates in fifty years." "The number of peaceful citizens in jail is shameful."
- Instead, introduce the quotation with a colon and/or **signal words**  
*Ex.* I am proposing a radical change to the drug laws in this country, because, as Tom Hughes writes, "The nation cannot continue to fill its prisons with nonviolent offenders" (45).  
  
The nation's prisons have reached a crisis stage in the drug war: "Millions of nonviolent prisoners flood in, while violent criminals bleed out" (Hughes 45).
- Add commentary after the quotation to explain its significance at this stage of your argument  
*Ex.* Tom Hughes writes, "The nation cannot continue to fill its prisons with nonviolent offenders." (45) To avoid this prison overpopulation, the justice system must rethink the drug laws.

### Some Signal Words

adds  
believes  
argues  
claims  
contends  
reports  
writes  
notes  
observes  
points out  
suggests  
implies  
insists

A sign of skillful writing is to incorporate partial direct quotations into your own sentences:

*Ex.* Today millions of nonviolent offenders are "lost in the maze of the rehabilitation and criminal justice industries" (Hughes 45).

## Paraphrase

Paraphrase—putting others’ ideas and direct quotations into your own words—is often preferable to quoting directly. When you can paraphrase, you show that you are able to understand and synthesize what others have said without merely parroting it. Paraphrase also helps your writing read more smoothly, as you can combine ideas from several different sentences (rather than interrupt your work with a lengthy quotation) and can choose shorter words or more streamlined phrases.

Original: Attorney General John Ashcroft testified in front of Congress today about the connection between national ballistic databases and the war on terrorism. Even when confronted with the FBI’s discovery that Al Qaeda manuals recommend buying semiautomatic weapons in the U.S. to use for future terrorism, Ashcroft refused to allow the Justice Department’s resources to be used to search gun-buying records for terrorist suspects because, he said, “The American public’s Second Amendment rights outweigh the slight chance that terrorists have bought guns for use in this country.”

Paraphrase: When Attorney General John Ashcroft was asked why he would not allow the Justice Department’s databases to be searched for terrorist information, he replied that to probe the records of the national databases would be to risk violating the rights of American gun-owners.

## Citing

You must cite **all** information that came from another source, **even paraphrases or facts and figures**. Although different disciplines follow different conventions (MLA, APA, Turabian, etc.), most of them currently recommend in-text citations.

When using in-text (or parenthetical) citations, whether for direct quotations or for paraphrased passages, you should either

- Include the author or source’s name in the context of the sentence, while citing the page number parenthetically  
*Ex.* Robert Strong writes that American literature today still cannot escape the influences of our Puritan ancestors (134).
- Omit direct reference to the author’s name but cite both name and page number parenthetically  
*Ex.* Even today, American literature cannot escape the influence of the Puritans (Strong 134).  
“Our modern American poetics has not freed itself from Puritan influence” (Strong 134).

There is usually no need to mention a book title in the context of your sentence, unless it is a well-known title or one of several books on the same subject. There is almost **never** a need to mention the name of an article, the journal it appeared in, publication date, or page number: such information bogs down your sentence and is made unnecessary by the Works Cited page.

- Ex.* In her article, “What’s Wrong with the Middle Class?” in the June 18, 2002, edition of *Newsweek*, Anna Quindlen argued that middle-class voters are becoming apathetic (18). →  
Anna Quindlen argues that middle-class voters are becoming apathetic (18).