

*INCLUDES  
MLA 2000  
Guidelines*

# **A Writer's Guide to Research and Documentation**

**FOURTH EDITION**

**KIRK G. RASMUSSEN**

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Writer's  
Guide  
to  
Research  
and  
Documentation**

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*UTAH VALLEY STATE COLLEGE*

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Using Sources</b>	<b>1</b>
1	Controlling Your Sources	1
2	Organizing Your Sources	1
	Outline your research conclusions	2
	Organize your supporting evidence	2
3	Synthesizing Information from Sources	2
4	Integrating Information from Sources	3
	Quoting effectively	3
	Paraphrasing effectively	8
	Summarizing effectively	10
5	Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism	11
	Using a documentation style	11
	Avoiding Plagiarism	12
<b>2</b>	<b>Documentation Sources: MLA Style</b>	<b>15</b>
1	Conventions for In-Text Citations	18
2	Conventions for Endnotes and Footnotes	22
3	Conventions for Lists of Works Cited	23
<b>3</b>	<b>Documenting Sources: Chicago Manual Style (CMS)</b>	<b>53</b>
1	Conventions for Marking In-Text Citations	53
2	Conventions for Positioning Notes and Bibliographies	54
3	Conventions for Endnote and Footnote Format	55
<b>4</b>	<b>Documenting Sources: APA Guidelines</b>	<b>65</b>
1	Conventions for In-Text Citations	66
2	Conventions for Footnotes	69
3	Conventions for the Reference List	69
<b>5</b>	<b>Documenting Sources: CBE Systems</b>	<b>81</b>
1	Conventions for the Citation-Sequence System	
	When Citing Sources In-Text	81
2	Conventions for the Name-Year System When Citing Sources In-Text	81
3	Conventions for Both Systems On the References Page	81

# Using Sources

Locating potential sources for a research project is one thing; deciding which ones to include, where to use them, and how to incorporate them is something else. Some writers begin making use of their sources in early exploratory drafts, perhaps by trying out a significant quotation to see how it brings a paragraph into focus. Others prefer to sift and arrange all of their note cards in neat stacks before making any decisions about what to include in their papers. No matter how you begin writing with sources, at some point you will need to incorporate them smoothly, effectively, and correctly into your paper.

## 1 Controlling Your Sources

Once you've conducted some research and are ready to begin planning the draft of your paper, you need to decide which sources you will use and how you will use them. You can't make this decision based on how much time you spent finding and analyzing each source; you have to decide according to how useful a source is for answering your research question. You need, that is, to control your sources rather than letting them control you.

Real research about real questions is vital and dynamic. It is always changing. Just as you can't expect your first working thesis to be your final thesis, you can't expect to know in advance which sources are going to prove most fruitful. And don't think you can't collect more information once you start drafting. At each step in the process you will see your research question and answer more clearly, so the research you conduct as you write may be the most useful of all. Similarly, and perhaps especially when you engage in field research, you will gain an increased sense of your audience as your research progresses, which can pay off in more reader-oriented writing.

## 2 Organizing Your Sources

One of the best strategies for maintaining personal control of your research paper is to make an outline first and then organize your notes accordingly. CAUTION: If you organize your notes in a logical sequence and then write an outline based on that sequence you'll be tempted to find a place for every note and to gloss over areas where you haven't done enough research.

## Outline your research conclusions

If you *outline* your research conclusions first, you'll let the logical flow of ideas create the blueprint for your paper. Your outline will change as your ideas continue to develop, so don't get too locked into your early outline. If you can't outline before you write, then be sure to begin writing—if only by drafting a “topic sentence” outline to start major sections—before you arrange your note cards.

## Organize your supporting evidence

Once you have outlined or begun drafting and have a good sense of the shape of your paper, **organize** your notes. Arrange the note cards so that they correspond to your outline, and put bibliographic cards in alphabetical order by the author's last name. Integrate field research notes as best you can, depending on their format. Finally, go back to your outline and annotate it to indicate which source goes where. By doing this, you can see if there are any ideas that need more research.

## 3 Synthesizing Information from Sources

As you prepare to draft, you need to assess all the information you have found and decide which sources are useful. Read your notes critically to evaluate each source, and **synthesize** the material into a new, coherent whole.

Synthesizing material involves looking for connections among different pieces of information and formulating ideas about what these connections mean. The connections may be similar statements made by several sources, or contradictions between two sources. Try to reach some conclusions on your own that extend beyond the information in front of you, then use those conclusions to form the goals for your paper.

Next decide how you will use your source information; base your decisions on your goals for the paper and not on the format of your research notes. Papers written in an effort “to get everything in” are source-driven and all too often read like patch jobs of quotations loosely strung together. Your goal should be to remain the director of the research production, your ideas on center stage and your sources the supporting cast. By synthesizing your information into a unique presentation, you remain at center stage.

Also, keep in mind that referring more than two or three times to a single source—unless it is itself the focus of your paper—undercuts your credibility and suggests overreliance on a single point of view. On the other hand, using synthesis to show how ideas from different sources relate to each other as well as how they relate to your own stance greatly improves the coherence of your essay. If you find yourself referring largely to one source—and therefore one point of view—make sure that you have sufficient references to add other points of view to your paper.

## 4 Integrating Information from Sources

Once you know which sources you want to use, you still have to decide how the ideas from these sources will appear in your paper. The notes you made during your research may be in many forms. For some sources, you will have copied down direct quotations; for others you will have paraphrased or summarized important information. For some field sources you may have made extensive notes on background information, such as your interview subject's appearance. Simply because you've quoted or paraphrased a particular source in your notes, however, doesn't mean you have to use a quotation or paraphrase from this source in your paper. Make decisions about how to use sources based on your goals, not on the format of your research notes.

At this point, it might be helpful for you to consider our suggestion that taking notes in your own words can pay major dividends in your research-based writing. Of major importance, of course, is the fact that drafting directly from quotations leads to a source-controlled essay—and frequently to a shortage of connecting information between ideas. Taking notes in your own words also helps your comprehension of the ideas and arguments you've read. It encourages you mentally to digest material rather than simply copying, and it makes your rereading of the notes more meaningful. For these and other reasons, practices such as photocopying large chunks of material—or downloading it via computer—are no substitute for the *note-writing* portion of your research work. Moreover, whether you quote, paraphrase, or summarize, you must acknowledge your source through documentation. Different disciplines have different conventions for documentation. The examples in this chapter use the documentation style of the Modern Language Association (MLA), the style preferred in the languages and literature field.

### Quoting effectively

Direct quotation provides strong evidence and can add both life and authenticity to your paper.

To quote, you must use an author's or speaker's exact words. Slight changes in wording are permitted in certain cases (see the next section), but these changes must be clearly marked. Although you can't change what a source says, you do have control over how much of it you use. Too much quotation can imply that you have little to say for yourself. Use only as long a quotation as you need to make your point. Remember that quotations should be used to support your points, not to say them for you.

### Shortening quotations

Long quotations slow readers down and often have the unintended effect of inviting them to skip over the quoted material. Unless the source quoted is itself the topic of the paper (as in a literary interpretation), limit brief quotations to no more than two per page and long quotations to no more than one every three pages.

Be sure that when you shorten a quotation, you have not changed its meaning. If you omit words within quotations for the sake of brevity, you must indicate that you have done so by using ellipsis points. Any changes or additions must be indicated with brackets.

### When to Quote

Direct quotations should be reserved for cases in which you cannot express the ideas better yourself. Use quotations when the original words are especially precise, clear, powerful, or vivid.

- **Precise.** Use quotations when the words are important in themselves or when the author makes fine but important distinctions.

Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one.

THOMAS PAINE

- **Clear.** Use quotations when the author's ideas are complex and difficult to paraphrase.

Paragraphs tell readers how writers want to be read.

WILLIAM BLAKE

- **Powerful.** Use quotations when the words are especially authoritative and memorable.

You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

- **Vivid.** Use quotations when the language is lively and colorful, when it reveals something of the author's or speaker's character.

Writing. I'm more involved in it, but not as attached.

KAREN, A STUDENT

### ORIGINAL

The human communication environment has acquired biological complexity and planetary scale, but there are no scientists or activists monitoring it, theorizing about its health, or mounting campaigns to protect its resilience. Perhaps it's too new, too large to view as a whole, or too containing—we swim in a sea of information, in poet Gary Snyder's phrase. All the more reason to worry. New things have nastier surprises, big things are hard to change, and containing things are inescapable.

Stewart Brand, *The Media Lab*



## INACCURATE QUOTATION

In *The Media Lab*, Stewart Brand describes the control that is exerted by watchdog agencies over modern telecommunications: “The human communication environment has ... activists monitoring it, theorizing about its health ...” (258).

*By omitting certain words, the writer has changed the meaning of the original source.*

## ACCURATE QUOTATION

In *The Media Lab*, Stewart Brand notes that we have done little to monitor the growth of telecommunications. Modern communication technology may seem overwhelmingly new, big, and encompassing, but these are reasons for more vigilance, not less: “New things have nastier surprises, big things are hard to change, and containing things are inescapable” (258).

## Integrating quotations into your paper

Direct quotations will be most effective when you integrate them smoothly into the flow of your paper. You can do this by providing an explanatory “tag” or by giving one or more sentences of explanation. But allow the quote to do its work. Don’t explain the quote in your own words (why quote if you’re going to restate the ideas?). Readers should be able to follow your meaning easily and to see the relevance of the quotation immediately.

**Using embedded or block format.** Brief quotations should be embedded in the main body of your paper and enclosed in quotation marks. According to MLA style guidelines, a brief quotation consists of four or fewer typed lines. NOTE: If you are using a different style manual, be sure to check its requirements. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, for instance, raises the number of lines to eight to ten and the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* specifies 40 or more words for the block format to be used.

Photo editor Tom Brennan took ten minutes to sort through my images and then told me, “Most photography editors wouldn’t take more than two minutes to look at a portfolio.”

Longer quotations should be set off in block format. Begin a new line, indent one inch or ten spaces (for MLA), and do not use quotation marks.

Katie Kelly focuses on Americans’ peculiarly negative chauvinism, in this case, the chauvinism of New York residents:

New Yorkers are a provincial lot. They wear their city’s accomplishments like blue ribbons. To anyone who will listen they boast of leading

the world in everything from Mafia murders to  
porno movie houses. (89)

**Ellipses.** Sometimes you may omit words from a quotation. In such cases, you have to alert the reader to the fact that you have left out a portion of the author's original passage. You do this by inserting ellipses within square brackets (for MLA).

Katie Kelly focuses on Americans' peculiarly negative chauvinism, in this case, the chauvinism of New York residents:

New Yorkers [. . .] wear their city's  
accomplishments like blue ribbons. To anyone  
who will listen they boast of leading the world  
in everything from Mafia murders to porno movie  
houses. (89)

Ellipses that appear within the original passage you are quoting, however, should *not* be enclosed within square brackets (for MLA). The presence of square brackets signals that *you* have omitted words, *not* the author of the original passage.

**Introducing quotations.** Introduce all quoted material so that readers know who is speaking, what the quotation refers to, and where it is from. If the author or speaker is well-known, it is especially useful to mention his or her name in an introductory signal phrase.

Henry David Thoreau asserts in *Walden*, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (5).

If your paper focuses on written works, you can introduce a quotation with the title rather than the author's name, as long as the reference is clear.

There are certain **signal phrases** to tell the reader that the words or ideas that follow come from another source. Choose a signal phrase that reflects the source's intentions, and to avoid monotony, vary the placement of the signal phrases you use.

*Walden* sets forth one individual’s antidote against the “lives of quiet desperation” led by the working class in mid-nineteenth-century America (Thoreau 5).

If neither the author nor the title of a written source is well known (or the speaker in a field source), introduce the quotation with a brief explanation to give your readers some context.

**Verbs Used in Signal Phrases**

The verb you choose for a signal phrase should accurately reflect the intention of the source.

acknowledges	concedes	illustrates	reports
admits	concludes	implies	reveals
agrees	declares	insists	says
argues	denies	maintains	shows
asserts	emphasizes	notes	states
believes	endorses	observes	suggests
claims	finds	points out	thinks
comments	grants	refutes	writes

Mary Catherine Bateson, daughter of anthropologist Margaret Mead, has become, in her own right, a student of modern civilization. In *Composing a Life* she writes, “The twentieth century has been called the century of the refugee because of the vast numbers of people uprooted by war and politics from their homes” (8).

**Explaining and clarifying quotations.** Sometimes you will need to explain a quotation in order to clarify why it’s relevant and what it means in the context of your discussion.

In *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold invites modern urban readers to confront what they lose by living in the city: “There are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from the furnace” (6). Leopold sees city-dwellers as self-centered children, blissfully but dangerously unaware of how their basic needs are met.

You may also need to clarify what a word or reference means. Do this by using square brackets.

**Adjusting grammar when using quotations.** A passage containing a quotation must follow all the rules of grammatical sentence structure: tenses should be consistent, verbs and subjects should agree, and so on. If the form of the quotation doesn’t quite fit the grammar of your own sentences, you can either

quote less of the original source, change your sentences, or make a slight alteration in the quotation. Use this last option sparingly, and always indicate any changes with brackets.

#### **UNCLEAR**

In *Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold follows various animals, including a skunk and a rabbit, through fresh snow. He wonders, “What got him out of bed?” (5)

#### **CLEAR**

In *Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold follows various animals, including a skunk and a rabbit, through fresh snow. He wonders, “What got [the skunk] out of bed?” (5).

#### **GRAMMATICALLY INCOMPATIBLE**

If Thoreau believed, as he wrote in *Walden* in the 1850s, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation” (5), then what would he say of the masses today?

The verb *lead* in Thoreau’s original quotation is present tense, but the sentence might call for the past tense form *led*.

#### **GRAMMATICALLY COMPATIBLE**

If Thoreau believed, as he wrote in *Walden* in the 1850s, that the masses led “lives of quiet desperation” (5), then what would he say of the masses today?

#### **GRAMMATICALLY COMPATIBLE**

In the nineteenth century, Thoreau stated, “The Mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation” (*Walden* 5). What would he say of the masses today?

#### **GRAMMATICALLY COMPATIBLE**

If Thoreau thought that in his day, the “mass of men [led] lives of quiet desperation” (*Walden* 5), what would he say of the masses today?

### **Paraphrasing effectively**

Although it is generally wise to write as many research notes as possible in your own words, you may have written down or photocopied many quotations instead of taking the time to put an author’s or speaker’s ideas into your own words.

To **paraphrase**, you restate a source’s ideas in your own words. The point of paraphrasing is to make the ideas clearer (both to your readers and to yourself) and to express the ideas in the way that best suits your purpose. In paraphrasing, attempt to preserve the intent of the original statement and to fit the paraphrased statement smoothly into the immediate context of your essay.

The best way to make an accurate paraphrase is to stay close to the order and structure of the original passage, to reproduce its emphasis and details in roughly the same number of words. The paraphrase and the original should be

## When to Paraphrase

Paraphrases generally re-create the original source's order, structure, and emphasis and include most of its details.

- **Clarity.** Use paraphrase to make complex ideas clear to your readers.
- **Details.** Use paraphrase only when you need to present details that an author or speaker has described at greater length.
- **Emphasis.** Use paraphrase when including an author's or speaker's point suits the emphasis you want to make in your paper.

approximately the same (or similar) in length. However, don't use the same sentence patterns or vocabulary or you risk inadvertently plagiarizing the source. (See page 10.)

If the original source has used a well-established or technical term for a concept, you do not need to find a synonym for it. If you believe that the original source's exact words are the best possible expressions of some points, you may use brief direct quotations within your paraphrase, as long as you indicate these with quotation marks.

Keep in mind why you are including this source; doing so will help you to decide how to phrase the ideas. Be careful, though, not to introduce your own comments or reflections in the middle of a paraphrase, unless you make it very clear that these are your thoughts, not the original author's or speaker's.

### ORIGINAL

The affluent, educated, liberated women of the First World, who can enjoy freedom unavailable to any woman ever before, do not feel as free as they want to. And they can no longer restrict to the subconscious their sense that this lack of freedom has something to do with—with apparently frivolous issues, things that really should not matter. Many are ashamed to admit that such trivial concerns—to do with physical appearance, bodies, faces, hair, clothes—matter so much.

Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 9

### INACCURATE PARAPHRASE

In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf argues that First-World women, who still have less freedom than they would like to have, restrict to their subconscious those matters having to do with physical appearance—that these things are not really important to them (9).

### ACCURATE PARAPHRASE

In *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf asserts that First-World women, despite their affluence, education, and liberation, still do not feel very free. Moreover, many of these women are aware that this lack of freedom is influenced by superficial things having primarily to do with their physical appearance—things which should not matter so much (9).

## Summarizing effectively

To **summarize**, you distill a source's words down to the main ideas and state these in your own words. A summary includes only the essentials of the original source, not the supporting details, and is consequently shorter than the original.

Keep in mind that summaries are generalizations and that many generalizations can make your writing vague and tedious. Summaries are most useful for introducing ideas and concepts and for drawing conclusions. You should occasionally supplement summaries with brief direct quotations or evocative details collected through observation to keep readers in touch with the original source.

### When to Summarize

As you draft, summarize often so that your paper doesn't turn into a string of undigested quotations.

- **Main points.** Use summary when your readers need to know the main point the original source makes but not the supporting details.
- **Overviews.** Sometimes you may want to devise a few sentences that will effectively support your discussion without going on and on. Use summary to provide an overview or an interesting aside without digressing too far from your paper's focus.
- **Condensation.** You may have taken extensive notes on a particular article or observation only to discover in the course of drafting that you do not need all that detail. Use summary to condense lengthy or rambling notes into a few effective sentences.

Summaries vary in length, and the length of the original source is not necessarily related to the length of the summary you write. Depending on the focus of your paper, you may need to summarize an entire novel in a sentence or two, or you may need to summarize a brief journal article in two or three paragraphs. Remember that the more material you attempt to summarize in a short space, the more you will necessarily generalize and abstract it. Reduce a text as far as you can while still providing all the information your readers need to know. Be careful, though, not to distort the original's meaning.

### ORIGINAL

For a long time I never liked to look a chimpanzee straight in the eye—I assumed that, as is the case with most primates, this would be interpreted as a threat or at least as a breach of good manners. Not so. As long as one looks with gentleness, without arrogance, a chimpanzee will understand and may even return the look.

Jane Goodall, *Through a Window* 12

## INACCURATE SUMMARY

Goodall learned from her ex-  
direct looks from humans (12)

y react positively to

## ACCURATE SUMMARY

Goodall reports that when humans look directly but gently into chimpanzees' eyes, the chimps are not threatened and may even return the look (12).

## 5 Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism

Acknowledging your sources through one of the accepted systematic styles of **documentation** is a service to your sources, your readers, and future scholars. Knowledge in the academic community is cumulative, with one writer's work building on another's. After reading your paper, readers may want to know more about a source you cited, perhaps in order to use it in papers of their own. Correct documentation helps them find the source quickly and easily.

Failure to document your sources is called **plagiarism**. Plagiarism is taking someone's ideas or information and passing them off as your own. The practice of citing sources for "borrowed" ideas or words is both customary and expected in academic writing.

Most plagiarism is not intentional; many writers are simply unaware of the conventional guidelines for indicating that they have borrowed words or ideas from someone else. Nevertheless, it is the writer's responsibility to learn these guidelines and follow them.

### Using a documentation style

Each discipline, or area of academic study, has developed its own conventions for documentation, a standardized set of guidelines that continue to evolve as the discipline evolves. The languages and literature disciplines use the style recommended by the Modern Language Association (MLA). Other humanities use a system of endnotes or footnotes. Social sciences use the style recommended by the American Psychological Association (APA). Natural sciences use the style recommended by the Council of Biology Editors (CBE) or a related style. Many disciplines in the physical sciences use the Chicago style (CMS) or the American Institute of Physics Style Manual (AIP). You should use the documentation of the discipline for which you are writing; if you are in doubt, ask your instructor.

Basically, you must attribute any idea or wording you use in your writing to the source through which you encountered that idea or those words, *if the material is not original to yourself*. You do not need to document *common knowledge*, that is, information that an educated person can be expected to know – knowledge commonly taught in school or carried in the popular media – or knowledge that can be found in multiple sources (encyclopedias, dictionaries). Examples include the dates of historical events, the names and locations of states and cities, the general laws of science, and so on. However, when you read the work of authors

## Avoiding Plagiarism

- Place all quoted passages in quotation marks and provide source information, even if it is only one phrase.
- Identify the source from which you have paraphrased or summarized ideas, just as you do when you quote directly.
- Give credit for any creative ideas you borrow from an original source. For example, if you use an author's anecdote to illustrate a point, acknowledge it.
- Replace unimportant language with your own, and use different sentence structures when you paraphrase or summarize.
- Acknowledge the source if you borrow any organizational structure or headings from an author. Don't use the same subtopics, for example.
- Put any words or phrases you borrow in quotation marks, especially an author's unique way of saying something.

who have specific opinions and interpretations of a piece of common knowledge and you use their opinions or interpretations in your paper, you must give them credit through proper documentation.

It is also important to note that even "nonpublished" ideas or words should be attributed to their sources whenever such documentation is feasible. For example, if you use opinions from a sidewalk poll, conversation, or Internet commentaries or a World Wide Web (WWW) page in your writing, you must cite that original source.

## Avoiding plagiarism

If you are not sure what you can take from a source and what you need to cite, ask a tutor or your instructor for help before you turn in your final paper. Also find out if your school has a booklet on avoiding plagiarism.

Most campuses with Online Writing Labs (OWL's) now have information about plagiarism available through Gopher or WWW. Similarly, your campus OWL, if one exists, is also likely to provide an e-mail-based "hot line" for rapid, direct answers to important questions about plagiarism.

The most common incidence of inadvertent plagiarism is a writer's paraphrasing or summarizing a source but staying too close to the wording or sentence structure of the original, sometimes lifting whole phrases without enclosing them in quotation marks. Keep in mind that when you paraphrase or summarize a source, you need to identify the author of those ideas just as if you had quoted directly.

To avoid plagiarism when you paraphrase, use your own words to replace language that is not important to quote exactly; in other words, you are attributing the ideas, but not the exact language, to the source. At the same time, make certain you cite *all* direct quotes, acknowledging that you are borrowing both the ideas *and the words*.



### **ORIGINAL**

The World Wide Web makes world-wide publishing possible to anyone who is able to arrange disk space on a server and has some basic knowledge of how pages are created.

Carol Lea Clark, *A Student's Guide to the Internet*

### **PLAGIARIZED PARAPHRASE**

World-wide publishing is possible for anyone who has access to server disk-space and who has knowledge of how Web pages are made. (Clark 77).

*The above example uses too much language from the original source.*

### **ACCEPTABLE PARAPHRASE**

With the basics of Web-page construction and storage space on a network server, Clark tells us, anyone can publish, at least potentially, for audiences around the world.

*This example translates source language into the writer's own language.*