Integrating Source Material

Research sources can bring authority, conviction, and persuasion to your argument. If you fail to integrate them properly, however, you risk convoluting your argument and confusing your audience. Learning to embed your references correctly will strengthen your argument and make you a better writer.

Whether you use a direct quote, a paraphrase, or a summary, you must connect the source material to what you have to say because, without the proper framework, your reference is left hanging and its relation to your argument is left unclear. It is better to risk overanalyzing the relevance of a source than to leave your reader in doubt.

A successful integration includes four parts:
- the introduction
- the quote
- the interpretation
- the commentary

Integration relies on more than one approach. Reordering your method of integration can bring variety and interest to your essay. The following is the traditional model for integrating sources into your writing.

Traditional Integration Model

*The introduction or lead-in* introduces the speaker and sets up the quote, paraphrase, or summary. Use it to give credibility to the source and to your argument. If necessary, blend the words of the original source with your own words.

The challenge, as college professor Ned Laff has put it, “is not simply to exploit students’ nonacademic interests, but to get them to see those interests through academic eyes” (52).¹

*The interpretation* explains the meaning of the source material in relation to the topic under discussion. However, the interpretation is not always necessary. You should rely on it when a reference merits special emphasis or the relevance of a reference is unclear. In the following example, the interpretation serves “to translate” the quotation referred to in the introduction.

To say that students need to see their interests “through academic eyes” is to say that street smarts are not enough. Making students’ nonacademic interests an object of academic study is useful, then, for getting students’ attention and overcoming their

boredom and alienation, but this tactic won’t in itself necessarily move them closer to an academically rigorous treatment of those interests.  

*The commentary* relates the source material back to the central argument and so fulfills the most important role of integration. Rely on it to focus your discussion on your overall purpose or claim. In the following example, the commentary serves its function by situating the quotation within the broader context of the analysis.

On the other hand, inviting students to write about cars, sports, or clothing fashions does not have to be a pedagogical cop-out as long as students are required to see these interests “through academic eyes,” that is, to think and write about cars, sports, and fashion in a reflective, analytical way, one that sees them as microcosms of what is going on in the wider culture.

**Reordered Integration**

A different style of integration can be just as successful as the traditional model. For example, you could provide the interpretation before you introduce the source.

In Zen everything has an innate Buddha nature; it only needs to be awakened. Buddha nature is another word for the divine connection we all have to the Godhead or Spirit. The only way to awaken one's true nature is to look within. Buddha nature cannot be found outside the body nor can it be discovered through intellectual study. Huineng the Sixth Patriarch reflected that "Deluded, a Buddha is a sentient being / Awakened, a sentient being is a Buddha" (Yampolsky 180). The Buddha nature is awakened through enlightenment.

**Signal Phrases**

Use a signal phrase to introduce a quote, paraphrase, or summary. It should include the author’s name and a verb that represents his or her tone accurately. The signal phrase can introduce, interrupt, or follow a quote.

*Introduces:* Dr. Jones confirms that “students need a strong disposition to earn a doctorate degree” (25).

*Interrupts:* “Students,” Dr. Jones confirms, “need a strong disposition to earn a doctorate degree” (25).

*Follows:* “Students need a strong disposition to earn a doctorate degree” confirms Dr. Jones (25).

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2 Graff, “Hidden Intellectualism,” 204.
3 Graff, “Hidden Intellectualism,” 204.
Avoid the he said/she said trap and bring character to your writing by using one of the following signal verbs. Choosing suitable signal verbs gives you credibility as a writer.

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**Integrating and Refining Block Quotes**

Block quotes also require integration. You usually introduce them with a sentence followed by a colon. Begin block quotes on a new line, indent only on the left, and use no quotation marks except when including material quoted by your source.

Use block quotes sparingly. Ask yourself these questions to determine how well a block quote might suit your purpose: *Is the entire passage necessary for clarity? Is all the information pertinent to my argument?*

If you were to refer to the following passage in order to present its main idea, you would find much of it irrelevant to your purpose.

Grammarian and author Joseph Williams argues that there are specific guidelines for sentence length and variation:

> Those who can write individually clear and concise sentences have achieved a good deal, and much more if they can assemble them into coherent passages. But a writer who can’t write clear sentences longer than twenty words or so is like a composer who can write only short jingles. No one can communicate complex ideas in short sentences alone, so you have to know how to assemble a sentence long and complex enough to express complex ideas, but still clear enough to be read easily. You can do that if you know some principles of sentence construction that go beyond SUBJECTS and VERBS, CHARACTERS and ACTIONS. (166)

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You could express the central point of the preceding passage by reducing it to the following:

When discussing sentence length and variation, grammarians and author Joseph Williams argues that “no one can communicate complex ideas in short sentences alone, so you have to know how to assemble a sentence long and complex enough to express complex ideas, but still clear enough to be read easily” (166).

Shorten long quotes to the most useful and concise information. Consider paraphrasing or summarizing instead of quoting.

**Some Requirements for Block Quotes**

According to MLA and Turabian guidelines, you must format quoted material as a block quote if it extends beyond four lines in your paper. The APA Manual, on the other hand, stipulates that you must format a quotation of more than forty words as a block quote. To learn more about how to format and cite long quotations, consult the appropriate style guide.

**Some Conventions for Altering Quotations**

Sometimes it is necessary to alter a quotation for the sake of brevity, consistency, or clarity. Use the following marks or symbols to identify alterations to a quote. In making such changes, be sure to retain the source’s original meaning.

Use an *ellipsis* to omit unnecessary information from the middle of a quote:

College professor John Tagg argues that “the basic scaffolding for professional development . . . should emphasize feedback to teachers, not evaluation of them” (332).  

Also use brackets when you want to establish grammatical consistency or clarify content by inserting your own word(s) into a quote:

Orgel argues that in Renaissance England “the distinctions of gender [were] fluid and unclear” (13).

As William Zinsser notes, “one secret of the art [of writing] is detail” (136).

Add the word sic (Latin for “in this manner”) to indicate that an error in grammar or spelling occurs in the original source rather than in your own writing. According to MLA guidelines, you should enclose it in brackets to point out the error within the quote, or enclose it in parentheses to point out the error after the quote:

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Discussing literary originality, Samuel Taylor Coleridge declared in the early nineteenth century that “we must emancipate ourselves of a false association from misapplied names and find a new word for the Plays of Shakespear” (sic) (466).9

For the purpose of pointing out errors in quotations, do not italicize *sic* when following MLA guidelines, but do italicize *sic* when following the conventions of many other styles, including Turabian and APA. Some other rules for modifying quotes also vary according to the style of documentation. For more information, consult the appropriate style guide.

## Contact
Want to talk about how you are integrating sources in your paper? Come work with a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

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