Incorporating sources strengthens the credibility of your argument. However, incorporating sources ineffectively (i.e., plagiarizing) can actually destroy your credibility. This handout will help you avoid plagiarism and incorporate sources through effective summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting.

**Why Incorporate Sources?**

**Supporting Arguments**
Your writing will contain arguments, and your arguments will need strong evidence to be convincing. While your own lived experience can provide strong evidence in some cases, you will usually have to incorporate information from external sources.

Remember, you should use sources to support your own arguments. Don’t include sources simply for the sake of including sources.

**Providing Context**
Your academic writing does not exist in a vacuum. Ideally, your writing will build on and respond to the work of other scholars. Including sources is one way of showing that your own ideas engage with the current conversation in your field.

**Plagiarism**

**Intentional Plagiarism**
Intentional plagiarism occurs when you take someone else’s ideas and try to present them as your own.

**Unintentional Plagiarism**
Unintentional plagiarism occurs when you incorporate a source ineffectively. Even if you include a citation, you can still inadvertently plagiarize if you fail to put a summary or paraphrase into your own words. To avoid this form of plagiarism, read the sections below about effectively summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting material.

**Self-Plagiarism**
You can also plagiarize yourself. This happens when you try to present previously published material as new. If you must reference your old work, be sure to cite it like you would any other source.
Critical Reading

In order to effectively incorporate sources, you need to know how to read critically. Many cases of plagiarism arise when a writer doesn’t understand the material well enough to effectively summarize or paraphrase.

If you find that you are not able to put information from a source into your own words, try explaining the material to a friend. Encourage your friend to ask questions, which will force you to provide more in-depth explanations. If you still cannot put the information into your own words, re-read the material.

*Note:* For more information on how to read critically, please see our “Critical Reading” handout.

Signal Phrases

Whether you decide to summarize, paraphrase, or quote a source, you need to introduce the material to your reader. Signal phrases do this by clearly marking where incorporated material begins.

**Example:** *According to* Potter (2007), House Elves...

**Example:** *As Potter (2007) has noted,* House Elves...

See the table below for some verbs to use in signal phrases.

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<th>Signal Phrase Verbs</th>
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Summarizing

**Definition**

**Summaries provide a brief overview of the author’s ideas,** usually focusing on the argument’s main points. Since they are idea-focused, summaries tend not to preserve any of the original language of the text. Specific details are also omitted. Summaries are particularly useful when providing background information or explaining different positions on a topic.

In some disciplines, a source can be summarized by reducing it to a single finding.

**Example:** Potter et al. (2007) found a correlation between ear thickness and aggression in House Elves.

Sometimes the finding takes precedence over the source, so no signal phrase is used.

**Example:** Ear thickness and aggression are correlated in House Elves (Potter et al., 2007).
How to Summarize Effectively
First, read the material, making sure to underline the author’s most important points.

Example (Granger, 2001, p. 26): The shortage of magic wands has already altered the way young wizards are educated. For example, Intro to Charms, once a core course, has now become an elective for first-year Hogwarts students. Wandless wizards and witches are forced to choose between additional courses in astronomy or Muggle studies. Needless to say, neither of these courses prepare students for a lifetime of conjuring. Without exposure to basic charms like levitation or wand-lighting, how can students be expected to succeed in more difficult courses like Defense Against the Dark Arts?

Then, list the main points in your own words. Focus on points that capture the essence of the argument.

Example:  
• Wand shortage impacts education.  
• Students can’t learn the basic wizarding skills they need.

Condense these points into a single sentence.

Example: The wand shortage has prevented students from learning basic wizarding skills.

Next, combine this sentence with a signal phrase.

Example: Granger (2001) argues that the wand shortage has prevented students from learning basic wizarding skills.

Finally, incorporate this summary into your broader argument.

Example: Several leading wizards have investigated the links between education and the broader magical economy. For example, Granger (2001) argues that the wand shortage has prevented students from learning basic wizarding skills. Lovegood and Longbottom (2005) have made a similar argument, noting that students from...

Paraphrasing

Definition
When you paraphrase, you restate the author’s ideas and examples in your own words. While a summary condenses an argument into its key points, a paraphrase maintains the length and level of detail of the original passage.

How to Paraphrase Effectively
First, decide if you actually need to paraphrase. Ask yourself, “Does my audience need this level of detail?” If the answer is “no,” then you should summarize the material. If the answer is “yes,” then read through the source, making sure to underline the main ideas as well as the most important details.

Example (Granger, 2001, p. 26): The shortage of magic wands has already altered the way young wizards are educated. For example, Intro to Charms, once a core course, has now become an elective for first-year Hogwarts students. Wandless wizards and witches are forced to choose between additional courses in astronomy or Muggle studies. Needless to say, neither of these courses prepare students for a lifetime of conjuring. Without exposure to basic charms like levitation or wand-lighting, how can students be expected to succeed in more difficult courses like Defense Against the Dark Arts?

List the points and details in your own words. Then, rearrange these elements into the most logical order.
For example, you might arrange the main points into a summarized central claim and then provide the details as a supporting example.

**Example:**
- CLAIM: Wand shortage impacts the quality of education.
- CLAIM: Students can’t learn the basic wizarding skills they need.
- EXAMPLE: Students don’t participate in basic wizarding courses like Intro to Charms.
- EXAMPLE: They can’t succeed in Defense Against the Dark Arts without basic skills.

Next, combine these elements into a cohesive set of sentences.

**Example:** The quality of wizarding education has declined due to the wand shortage. Without wands, beginning students can’t learn core wizarding skills. And when students aren’t able to participate in basic wizarding courses, like Intro to Charms, they don’t develop those fundamental skills necessary to succeed in advanced courses like Defense Against the Dark Arts.

Add a signal phrase. Be sure to include the page number when paraphrasing a specific section.

**Example:** Granger (2001) argues that the quality of wizarding education has declined due to the wand shortage. Without wands, beginning students can’t learn core wizarding skills. And when students aren’t able to participate in basic wizarding courses, like Intro to Charms, they don’t develop those fundamental skills necessary to succeed in advanced courses like Defense Against the Dark Arts (p. 26).

Finally, incorporate your paraphrase into your larger argument.

**Example:** Several leading wizards have investigated the links between education and the broader magical economy. For example, Granger (2001) argues that the quality of wizarding education has declined due to the wand shortage. Without wands, beginning students can’t learn core wizarding skills. And when students aren’t able to participate in basic wizarding courses, like Intro to Charms, they don’t develop those fundamental skills necessary to succeed in advanced courses like Defense Against the Dark Arts (p. 26). However, Granger fails to take into account the...

**The Danger of Patchwriting**

A patchwrite is a failed paraphrase, and it counts as unintentional plagiarism. Patchwriting occurs when you simply swap out words for their synonyms while maintaining the overall structure of the original material. In other words, there are patches of your voice and patches of the original source, but it is not clear which is which.

**Original:** The shortage of magic wands has already altered the way young wizards are educated. For example, Intro to Charms, once a core course, has now become an elective for first-year Hogwarts students.

**Patchwrite:** Granger (2001) argues that the lack of magic wands has already changed the method by which young wizards are taught. For example, Intro to Charms, at one time a fundamental class, has now “become an elective for first-year Hogwarts students” (p. 26).

**Note:** The author has merely replaced words with their synonyms. The overall sentence structure is identical to the original. The author has tried to hide this fact by including a direct quotation.

If you find yourself patchwriting, it may indicate that you do not fully understand the material.
Quoting

**Definition**
When you quote, you use the exact language of the source. While many beginning writers fill their papers with lengthy quotes, more experienced writers quote with exacting precision, using only the most relevant pieces of the quotation.

Use direct quotations only if the exact wording of the source is a matter of investigation. This is often the case with definitions or with textual analysis.

Example: Potter (2007) has characterized the House Elf situation as “the defining magical issue of our time” (p. 38).

If you choose to omit information from a quote or if it is necessary to add or substitute words, punctuate with ellipses or brackets, respectively.

*Note:* For more information on how to punctuate quotes, please see our “Quotation Marks” handout.

**How to Quote Effectively**
First, ask yourself if you really need the quotation. Ask, “Is the wording itself important or controversial?” If the answer is “no,” then you should summarize or paraphrase the material. If the answer is “yes,” then read through the material, underlining the main points of the passage as well as any important phrases.

Example (Granger, 2001, p. 26): The shortage of magic wands has already altered the way young wizards are educated. For example, Intro to Charms, once a core course, has now become an elective for first-year Hogwarts students. Wandless wizards and witches are forced to choose between additional courses in astronomy or Muggle studies. Needless to say, neither of these courses prepare students for a lifetime of conjuring. Without exposure to basic charms like levitation or wand-lighting, how can students be expected to succeed in more difficult courses like Defense Against the Dark Arts?

Using the steps discussed above, summarize the main points.

Example: The wand shortage has prevented students from learning basic wizarding skills.

Then, incorporate the most important parts of the quotation into the larger summary.

Example: The wand shortage has prevented students from learning basic wizarding skills and has forced them to take courses that don’t “prepare students for a lifetime of conjuring.”

Add a signal phrase. Be sure to include the page number with the citation.

Example: Granger (2001) argues that the wand shortage has prevented students from learning basic wizarding skills and has forced them to take courses that don’t “prepare students for a lifetime of conjuring” (p. 26).

Finally, incorporate everything into your larger argument.

Example: Several leading wizards have investigated the links between education and the broader magical economy. For example, Granger (2001) argues that the wand shortage has prevented students from learning basic wizarding skills and has forced them to take courses that don’t “prepare students for a lifetime of conjuring” (p. 26). But not everyone agrees with this assessment. Chan (2007) has stressed...
The Danger of Dangling Quotations

Many beginning writers include direct quotes without integrating them into their own sentences. These quotes dangle, lacking any solid connection to other sentences in the paragraph.

**Example:** Several leading wizards have investigated the links between education and the broader magical economy. “Wandless wizards and witches are forced to choose between additional courses in astronomy of Muggle studies” (Granger, 2001, p. 26). This has caused...

To avoid dangling quotations, remember to use signal phrases and to incorporate only the most important parts of the quotation. Above all, remember that your sources should work to support your argument. Avoiding dangling quotations helps your readers understand the logical connections between your argument and your sources.

References


