

Using Evidence

The phrase “**using evidence**” sound like it belongs more in a courtroom or a crime scene than in a writing classroom. When we think of this word, a whole host of images that might pop into our head:

- a police officer putting on gloves and picking up an object in an area cordoned off with yellow crime scene tape
- a reporter squinting at a computer screen or shifting through stacks of paper in search of a piece of information for a story
- a lawyer in a courtroom, holding up a weapon in a numbered bag and using it to prove his case to a jury

Of course, when we hear “**evidence**,” we might also think of more traditional synonyms or definitions, such as an object or document that:

- provides **proof** or **corroboration**
- functions as a form of **validation** or **authentication**
- acts as a vehicle of **persuasion**
- serves as **documentation**
- indicates **truth** or **accuracy**

The item that the police officer finds at the crime scene; the information that the reporter uncovers; the weapon that the lawyer holds up to the jury in the courtroom: while each may be physically different, they all function in a similar way because they all serve as a kind of **evidence**.

It’s kind of comforting to know that people like police officers, reporters and lawyers all have to find enough evidence to make their case or their argument. But it can be unsettling when we’re asked to do it ourselves – especially in our writing.

As we discussed earlier in this textbook in the chapter on rhetoric, **artistic arguments** – arguments that use ethos, pathos and logos in some form or fashion – allow us to use the credibility, emotional connection, and sensible structure that is largely our own invention to make our point.

But the kind of evidence that we’re discussing in this chapter is the kind most often used in **non-artistic arguments** – in other words, it’s the kind of evidence that isn’t our invention. It’s the kind of evidence that we have to seek out from other people and other reliable sources, the kind of evidence that changes from assignment to assignment and genre to genre. Sometimes that evidence might come from a personal interview or an article from an academic journal; other times, it could be an excerpt from a novel or a newspaper article.

Sometimes when we're asked to use evidence in a piece of writing, we have a visceral reaction to this request. If we don't have much experience doing research or incorporating evidence into our writing, it can be intimidating, even a little frightening. What, we think, is my word not enough? Where am I supposed to find this "evidence"? How will I know if it's any good? And what on earth am I supposed to do with it once I have it?

Why do we react this way? Because, first of all, it's natural to be a little nervous about writing something in a different format than we're used to, especially if it requires more steps and more rigorous analytical thinking than we may have used in the past.

In addition, writing is too often portrayed culturally as some kind of magical, mysterious, mystical process that some people are good at and some people aren't, and we often assume that if we don't know how to do it right away, then we must be the person who isn't good at it.

But as natural as the nervousness is, this perception of writing as some kind of magic is a myth. In truth, clear, effective writing is largely achieved by learning to implement a few rules and putting in some hard work. This, too, is the key to using evidence effectively.

In this chapter, we'll outline and explain four steps in this process, which will help you:

- **determine which sources are best for your piece of writing**
- **understand what your sources are arguing**
- **incorporate those sources into your writing so that they bolster your claim**
- **revise your work so that your use of evidence is most effective**

Step One

Review: What do I have?

Looking for sources can be both time-consuming and tedious – hours in the library sifting through the stacks for that perfect book or journal, hours on the Internet reading link after link, trying to find the best piece of relevant information.

Although it's sometimes frustrating, doing research and doing it well does require the dedication of some time. And when you finally sit down to write that paper, you don't want to stare at a stack of books or articles or links and wonder, what do I have here? Before you pick up a pen or open that Word document, you need to have a good idea of what you have in your possession, so you have to **evaluate your sources**. Here are a few tips on how to do that:

- **Be discriminating: make sure you are using the best, most reliable and trustworthy sources possible.** Although Wikipedia might seem like a go-to for gathering some quick research on a topic, a crowd-sourced website that allows anyone to edit its entries isn't as trustworthy as, for example, a website run by a college or university or a government agency.

It's certainly better to get information about the resurgence in measles or the latest Ebola outbreak in Africa from, say, the National Institutes of Health, the nation's top medical research agency which is staffed and run by some of the world's best doctors, rather than from the Wikipedia entry for either of these topics, which could have been edited by anyone (and chances are, it isn't someone with a medical degree). For more on why choosing the most reliable sources is so important, you'll find a real-life example in Case Study 1 on pg. ?

- **If a source doesn't seem to work for you, the bibliography might.** It's frustrating to realize that sometimes a source that you've worked hard to find isn't the best source for you at all (see the box "The Pain of Tossing Out Sources" on pg. ?). However, that doesn't mean that the source is completely useless. Before you toss that source, make sure you check its bibliography: many times, you'll find a host of new sources on your same topic, and chances are there may be one that you hadn't found through other means.

And because you're using the bibliography of a source that had some relationship to your topic, you have a better chance of striking gold with something on that list. Even Wikipedia, which is questionable as a source by itself, can prove fruitful: if you check out the pages on Ebola, for example, and look for the numbers at the ends of a sentence, that indicates that the sentence has a source for its information:



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Ebola virus disease

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
(Redirected from [Ebola](#))

"*Ebola*" redirects here. For other uses, see *[Ebola \(disambiguation\)](#)*.

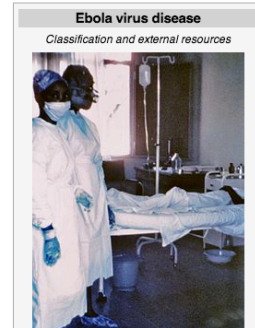
Ebola virus disease (EVD) or **Ebola hemorrhagic fever (EHF)** is the human disease caused by [ebola viruses](#). Symptoms start two days to three weeks after contracting the virus with a [fever](#), throat and muscle pains, and [headaches](#). There is then [nausea](#), vomiting and [diarrhea](#) along with decreased functioning of the [liver](#) and [kidneys](#). At this point some people begin to have problems with [bleeding](#).^[1]

The disease is first acquired by a population when a person comes into contact with the [blood](#) or [bodily fluids](#) of an infected animal such as a monkey or [fruit bat](#). Fruit bats are believed to carry and spread the disease without being affected by it. Once infected the disease may be spread from one person to another. Men who survive may be able to transmit the disease sexually for nearly two months. To make the diagnosis, typically other diseases with similar symptoms such as [malaria](#), [cholera](#) and other [viral hemorrhagic fever](#) are excluded. The blood may then be tested for either [antibodies](#) to the virus, the viral [DNA](#), or the virus itself to confirm the diagnosis.^[1]

Prevention involves decreasing the spread of the disease from infected monkeys and pigs to humans. This may be done by checking these animals for infection and killing and properly disposing of the bodies if the disease is discovered. Properly cooking meat and wearing protective clothing when handling meat may be helpful, as may wearing protective clothing and [washing hands](#) when around someone sick with the disease. Samples from people with the disease should be handled with an extra degree of caution.^[1]

There is no specific treatment for the virus with efforts to help people including giving the person either oral rehydration

Reference endnote



That source is listed at the bottom of the page in the "Reference" section:

References [edit]

- ¹ ↑ *["Ebola virus disease Fact sheet N°103"](#)*. World Health Organization. March 2014. Retrieved 12 April 2014.
- ² ↑ *["Ebola Viral Disease Outbreak — West Africa, 2014"](#)*. CDC. June 27, 2014. Retrieved 26 June 2014.
- ³ ↑ Nausea is accompanied by abdominal pain, diarrhea, and vomiting. ^[1]
- ⁴ ↑ Eichner M, Dowell SF, Fiese N (2011). "Incubation Period of Ebola Hemorrhagic Virus Subtype Zaire OH AND BRETT". *Osong Public Health and Research Perspectives* **2** (1): 3–7. doi:10.1016/j.phrp.2011.04.001. PMID 24159443.
- ⁵ ↑ *[Hoenen T, Groseth A, Falzarano D, Feldmann H \(May 2006\). "Ebola virus: unravelling pathogenesis to combat a deadly disease". *Trends in Molecular Medicine* **12** \(5\): 206–215. doi:10.1016/j.molmed.2006.03.006. PMID 16616035.](#)*
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- ⁷ ↑ *[Fisher-Hoch SP, Platt GS, Neild GH, Southee T, Baskerville A, Raymond RT, Lloyd G, Simpson DI \(1985\). "Pathophysiology of shock and hemorrhage in a fulminating viral infection \(Ebola\)". *J. Infect. Dis.* **152** \(5\): 887–894. doi:10.1093/infdis/152.5.887. PMID 4045253.](#)*
- ⁸ ↑ *["Emergence of Zaire Ebola Virus Disease in Guinea — Preliminary Report"](#)*. New England Journal of Medicine. 16 April 2014. Retrieved 3 May 2014.
- ⁹ ↑ *[25 people in Bakaklion, Cameroon killed due to eating of ape](#)*
- ¹⁰ ↑ *[Pourrut X, Kumulungui B, Wittmann T, Moussavou G, Délicat A, Yaba P, Nkoghe D, Gonzalez JP, Leroy EM \(2005\). "The natural history of Ebola virus in Africa". *Microbes and infection / Institut Pasteur* **7** \(7–8\): 1005–1014. doi:10.1016/j.micinf.2005.04.006. PMID 16002313.](#)*
- ¹¹ ↑ *[Morvan JM, Deubel V, Gounon P, Nakouné E, Barrière P, Murri S, Perpète O, Selekon B, Coudrier D, Gautier-Hion A, Colyn M, Volekhov V \(1999\). "Identification of Ebola virus sequences present as RNA or DNA in organs of](#)*
- ¹² ↑ *[Philippines"](#)*. New York Times. Retrieved 2009-01-26.
- ¹³ ↑ *[McCormick & Fisher-Hoch 1999](#)*, p. 300
- ¹⁴ ↑ *[Waterman, Tara \(1999\). *Ebola Cote D'Ivoire Outbreaks*. Stanford University.](#)* Retrieved 2009-05-30.
- ¹⁵ ↑ *["End of Ebola outbreak in Uganda"](#)* (Press release). World Health Organization. 2008-02-20.
- ¹⁶ ↑ *[Wamala, J; Lukwago, L; Malimbo, M; Nguku, P; Yoti, Z; Musenero, M; Amone, J; Mbazizi, W; Nanyunja, M; Zaramba, S; Opio, A; Lutwama, J; Talisuna, A; Okware, I; \(2010\). "Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever Associated with Novel Virus Strain, Uganda, 2007–2008". *Emerging Infectious Disease* **16** \(7\). Retrieved 2010-06-24.](#)*
- ¹⁷ ↑ *[\[2\]](#)*
- ¹⁸ ↑ *[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization \(1998\). *Infection Control for Viral Haemorrhagic Fevers in the African Health Care Setting* \(PDF\). Atlanta, Georgia, US: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.](#)* Retrieved 2013-02-08.
- ¹⁹ ↑ *[Center for Disease Control, Special Pathogens Branch. *Questions and Answers about Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever*](#)* Atlanta, Georgia, US: Center for Disease Control.
- ²⁰ ↑ *[Sullivan NJ, Geisbert TW, Geisbert JB, Xu L, Yang ZY, Roederer M, Koup RA, Jahrling PB, Nabel GJ \(2003\). "Accelerated vaccination for Ebola virus haemorrhagic fever in non-human primates". *Nature* **424** \(6949\): 681–684. doi:10.1038/nature01876. PMID 12904795.](#)*
- ²¹ ↑ *[Jones SM, Feldmann H, Ströher U, Geisbert JB, Fernando L, Grolla A, Klenk HD, Sullivan NJ, Volchkov VE, Fritz EA, Daddario KM, Hensley LE, Jahrling PB, Geisbert TW \(2005\). "Live attenuated recombinant vaccine protects nonhuman primates against Ebola and Marburg viruses". *Nature Medicine* **11** \(7\): 786–790. doi:10.1038/nm1258. PMID 15937495.](#)*

Reference endnote source

(Images from Wikipedia, accessed June 28, 2014)

Often, that source information includes a hyperlink that allows you to link directly to the original primary or secondary source on the Wikipedia page. But you have to be careful: sometimes, the link is to a personal blog or website instead of a reputable organization or agency. Before you use that information, double-check the source itself for credibility and accuracy.

[BOX: The Pain of Tossing Out Sources: So here's an uncomfortable fact about research that many people don't like to talk about: yes, you are going to have to read things you won't end up using in your paper. It's difficult to admit, but you will spend valuable time throughout your college career reading a host of sources that you will realize, in the end, aren't what you're looking for, and you'll have to scrap them. The first time you do this, it will feel a little bit like throwing away a \$20 dollar bill (after all, your time is worth something, and you just flushed it away!)]

But what you'll discover is that learning to let go sometimes will help you to become much more effective at using evidence well. The pain of tossing away a source that you've spent time on is counterbalanced by your growing understanding of how to distinguish valuable sources from ones that aren't as valuable. And, in the end, you'll become a better writer, because your professors will see that you didn't just throw in every source and the kitchen sink to get a paper done, but instead you tried to choose the best possible sources to bolster your particular claims. And getting the good grades that come along with that realization is a pretty great pain reliever.]

- **If a source does work for you, again, the bibliography also might.** Just as the bibliography of a source that you discard might be valuable, so might the bibliography of a source that you deem helpful – likely, even more so. Be sure to read through them to see what other research gems you might uncover that you may have overlooked.
- **Make sure you are using a diversity of sources.** Although you may have gathered 10 sources, if they are all sources by the same author or from the same publication, you're not getting a representative sampling of the diversity of research available out there on your topic. No matter how unbiased we attempt to be, humans are fundamentally biased; although we all try to keep our biases out of our work, none of us are perfect. So if you consult only one author or one publication for your information on a topic, you run the risk of falling prey to their individual biases, which might created a blind spot in how you support your claim. If you draw from a diversity of sources, however, chances are your pool of sources will balance one another out – what one misses, another will see clearly.
- **Make sure your sources aren't all from the same time period.** Unless you are researching a topic whose development stalled during some period of time, it's generally not a good idea to have sources that were all written during the same period. If you do, generally you'll end up missing critical information.

For example, if you chose to not to read any research on Al Franken beyond what was published about him through 2007, you might still think he was a comedian, talk-show host and former *Saturday Night Live* writer who had an interest in stirring the political pot with his writing and commentary. But if you expanded your research beyond that year, you'd learn that Franken ran for Senate in Minnesota and was narrowly elected to the office in 2008, where he still serves today. As you can see, it's incredibly important to broaden the pool of your research to cover both historical and contemporary time periods because a lot can change on a topic in just a few short years.

- **After you've noted all of these issues, look for obvious gaps in your research.** Once you've narrowed your list of sources and noted the patterns listed above, look for the gaps and try as best you can to fill them in. If there's a gap or a concentration for some reason, make sure you can justify it – for example, if you have a host of valuable sources from the year 1996, maybe there was a surge in research on your topic that year that advanced knowledge about your topic in some fundamental way. Or if you have several sources from the same author, perhaps that person is a noted and reliable scholar who deserves a little more textual landscape than some others. Don't be afraid of gaps and don't feel like your sources have to be perfectly balanced – just be prepared to justify those gaps to yourself and your audience.

Case Study 1: Judith Miller's Reporting on Weapons of Mass Destruction



Judith Miller (NYT)

Even researchers with a reputation for vigilance can sometimes make mistakes when it comes to distinguishing reliable sources from unreliable ones. Judith Miller, a Pulitzer-Prize winning reporter for *The New York Times*, found that out the hard way.

Miller, in conjunction with journalist James Risen, won the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting in 2002 for their 2001 coverage of their coverage of global terrorism before and after the September 11 attacks. Despite winning the highest accolade for journalism in the country, Miller was still susceptible to making a mistake with a source. Much of her coverage of the Iraq War and the country's supposed "weapons of mass destruction" in 2002 and 2003 was later proven to have been based on incorrect information.

The source of at least some of that incorrect information was Ahmed Chalabi, an Iraqi politician and former oil minister who was initially a trusted intelligence

informant for the United States government. Chalabi's information linking Saddam Hussein to Al-Qaeda and weapons of mass destruction, however, was later proven false, and his position as informant and his relationship to the United States grew sour.

Trusting the wrong source had a dramatic impact on Judith Miller and on her career: by October 2005, even the *Times* Public Editor Byron Calame was stating publicly that because of the inaccuracies in her reporting, it would be "difficult for her to return to the newsroom as a reporter."

For any other reporter, this kind of inaccuracy would probably be a career-ender, but winning the Pulitzer Prize does still hold some weight: Miller continued to write for other publications and eventually was offered a job at Fox News, which she still holds today. Still, the legacy of not being discriminating enough about her source is one that will follow her name throughout the remainder of her career and likely her life.

Read more about Judith Miller here:

- From *The New York Times*, "Threats and Responses: The Iraqis; US Says Hussein Intensifies Search for A-Bomb Parts": <http://nyti.ms/1ogLdg9>
- From *The New York Times*, "The Miller Mess: Lingering Issues Among the Answers": <http://nyti.ms/1vIWGvR>

Case Study Exercises:

- 1) Read some of the additional reporting from and about Judith Miller's reporting on Iraq in the early 2000s. What could and/or should have Miller done differently in order to verify the accuracy of the information she was receiving from Chalabi?
- 2) Consider your own approach to verifying information for a paper. What are you doing now to make sure that the information you are gathering is accurate? What could you do differently to improve upon this process?

Step Two

Reflect: What does it mean?

Now that you have a good idea of what kind and what variety of sources you have, you also need to have a good understanding of what those sources are saying. That stack of books or articles might be intimidating, but again, you'll have a much better grasp on where your paper is headed if you have an understanding of what the larger academic and cultural conversation is about your topic. So, again, before you start to write, make sure you **understand the content of your sources**. Here are a few tips that will help you move through that process smoothly and effectively:

- **Understand the ethos of your source's author.** Before you even begin reading a source, it's a good idea to do a little cursory reading about the author. Read their bio in the back of the book; perhaps Google them quickly to see what you can find. As we noted in Step One, we're all biased – it's unavoidable – so it might be a good idea to know what your author's history is related to the subject they are writing about.

For example, Dr. Mehmet Oz, host of the “Dr. Oz Show,” might seem like a reputable source to quote on the medical value of green coffee beans or *Garcinia cambogia*. But a little research shows that he has been called before a congressional subcommittee on consumer safety, and the committee has stated that both green coffee beans and *Garcinia cambogia* have been promoted as tools for weight loss on Dr. Oz's show, but that neither product has any scientific evidence to back up those statements.

- **Don't quote from sources with which you aren't familiar.** It might seem easy to simply flip to a page in a source and to pull a quote out to use in your paper, but it's also a very risky maneuver. When you pull out a quote at random that looks good – an action called “contextomy” – you risk two important things. First of all, you risk misunderstanding the context of that quote. What that means, in essence, is that if you haven't read the entire chapter or section that a quote comes from, chances are you're going to miss an important part of the argument. Second, if you don't read the entire article or book, there's a good chance that you're going to miss out on a quote that might be even better than the one you're choosing.
- **Similarly, have a good understanding of each source's argument.** This is a challenge, but it's absolutely worth it, and it goes hand-in-hand with the previous suggestion. Make sure that you actually read your sources and that you try to pinpoint the argument that the author is making. If it is an article, what is the one takeaway that the author is attempting to prove? If it is a book, what is the overall point that ties the chapters together?
- **Learn how to skim and scan effectively.** Reading an article or two for an essay seems pretty reasonable, but an entire book? Or two? Or more? This kind of research is daunting to most students to say the least. But learning to skim and to scan effectively will help you move through large volumes of text while still gathering pertinent information.

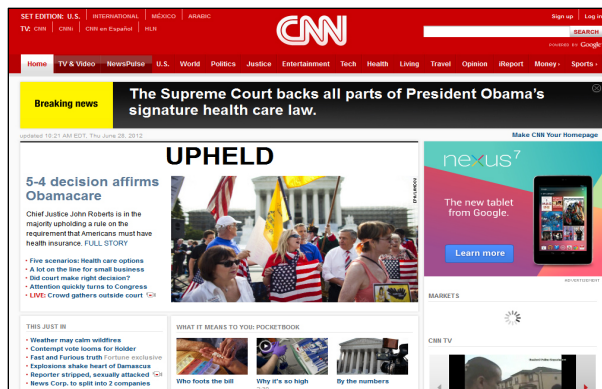
Skimming is essentially a method of reading where you move your eyes quickly over a source while attempting to gather information that will help you better understand the source's main points. Read for these informational clues while skimming:

- The source's title
- Chapter headings
- Sub-headings for sections within chapters
- The introductory paragraph in full
- The first and last sentence of each paragraph (if the source is not book-length)
- The concluding paragraph in full
- Unusual words
- Words that provide concrete answers to the "five w" questions and "how"
- Any words that are italicized, in bold, or set apart in any way
- Any graphics

Scanning is essentially a method of reading where you read over large volumes of information in a source while looking for particular information. Read for these informational clues while skimming:

- Main ideas (typically in an introductory paragraph or a topic sentence)
 - Facts or statistics
 - Quotes
 - Dates
 - Other information related to a person, thing or event
- **Take notes on your sources.** Reading through your sources is valuable, but when it comes time to write your paper, you'll frustrate yourself to no end if you don't have notes on those sources to which you can refer. Note-taking, which can include writing down memorable points on a separate piece of paper or adding margin notes to a text (also called annotation), is a valuable skill that not only gives you a quick reference point for what you've read, but it also helps you to retain that information a bit better. Here are a few tips on note-taking and annotation:
 - Take notes on the same categories and clues that you skim and scan for
 - Make sure to write down page numbers for quick reference
 - Using different-colored highlighters to identify different points in the text
 - Write down a summarizing word or phrase next to a particularly relevant paragraph or passage
 - At the end of your notes on a source, write down a quick paragraph or sentence synopsis with the most important take-away
 - Group the notes of similar sources together

Case Study 2: Media Misunderstands Supreme Court's Obamacare Vote



Poynter's screenshot of CNN's website

Major news networks usually take great pains to get their facts right, but sometimes even they misunderstand their source material in their haste to get a news story out to the public. The Supreme Court's June 28, 2012 decision on the Affordable Care Act, known colloquially as "Obamacare," is case-in-point.

The Supreme Court's decision on Obamacare was revolutionary in a number of ways: it upheld a very

controversial piece of legislation that changed Americans' relationship to their healthcare and their healthcare system, but it also showcase a major flub on the part of two prominent media outlets.

In the minutes following the release of the decision, networks and media outlets – including Reuters, the Associated Press, and Dow Jones – attempted to wrestle their way through the nearly 200-page decision and concluded that the Supreme Court had upheld one of the legislation's most controversial components: the individual mandate that requires all United States residents to have health insurance. Both CNN and Fox News reported that the mandate had been struck down.

Why did this error occur? There's no doubt that the reporters and producers on the story were rushed and eager to get their information out first and didn't take the time to review the primary source document – the ruling itself – in enough detail. According to a story issued by Poynter on June 28, CNN issued a correction about 90 minutes after the error occurred and said that the network "regrets that it didn't wait to report out the full and complete opinion regarding the mandate." Fox News also issued an apology to its viewers.

This kind of error by major media organizations illustrated that no one is immune to making this kind of mistake. CNN was embarrassed publicly and compounded its problems by not only reporting the error on the ruling on its live broadcast, but also on its website, by email, and on its social media sites. Its tweet about the ruling, for example, was retweeted hundreds of times by the time the network realized its error and sent out a correction over 10 minutes later. Fox News was also embarrassed by its error on live tv, but because at the time it hadn't fully integrated its method of distributing information digitally, it did not deal with as many retractions as CNN had to cope with. The moral of the story? Make sure you

read your source thoroughly and get your information right, even if you don't get it out first.

Read more about CNN and Fox News' error on Obamacare here:

- From Poynter.org, "CNN, Fox News err in covering Supreme Court healthcare ruling": <http://bit.ly/1r3HCWa>
- From SCOTUSblog, "We're getting wildly different assessments": <http://bit.ly/1iRYoVr>

Case Study Exercises:

- 1) Read the SCOTUSblog article, particularly the section under the time 10:08:30 where journalist Tom Goldstein talks about his skimming approach to reading the Supreme Court's opinion. What did he do well in this exercise? What could he have improved upon to make his skimming more effective?
- 2) Consider the apology that CNN and Fox News offered their viewers after they realized their mistake. What would you do if you realized that you had made a serious error in your assessment of a source for a paper? How would you approach your professor to discuss it? And how could you keep yourself from making that kind of error in the future?

Step Three

Respond: What do I do with it?

Now that you've evaluated your sources and understand their content, you're ready to start writing. Once you get your introduction and your thesis crafted, you'll probably be looking for source material to use to bolster your first point, so you're also ready to begin to **integrate sources into your paper**. This is an exciting point in the writing process, but it's also tricky – many students get frustrated when they begin to put source material into their work, because they're not quite sure how to do it effectively. Here are a few tips for you on how to make sure that that source material works to both bolster your claim and push you to make it even stronger:

- **Draft freely.** Although this isn't a point that is directly related to using evidence, it's a point that, if executed well, will allow you to integrate your evidence more effectively. Try your best to turn off your internal editor and just write. Get your ideas down on paper to the best of your ability so that you aren't judging your work harshly while it is still in an early draft stage and so that you can feel confident about your initial ideas. This will give you more courage to reach out during the revision process to integrate your source material.

- **Use shorthand to designate places in your paper where you'd like to include source material.** Don't feel compelled to integrate your source material seamlessly on the first try. Most effective writers have worked with and revised their source material numerous times in order to integrate it smoothly. Sometimes the easiest way to begin the process is to simply put a note to yourself in the text of your paper about what source you want to use and what point you'll be highlighting from it in parentheses next to your claim. You can come back later and work on polishing it.
- **Let your sources inform your thesis and your claims.** When you write a paper, remember that you aren't starting off with an ironclad idea for which you need to find absolute and unequivocal support. Your thesis is not static – it's elastic, and it should be flexible and receptive to change based on what source material you've discovered. In other words, you aren't making an inflexible argument and then looking for sources to support that idea – you are actually testing your argument similar to the way that scientists test a hypothesis, and as a result, you need to be willing to adapt that argument to new discoveries and information just as scientists do. That does not mean, however, that you shouldn't have confidence in your argument or that you should scrap it at the first sign that one of your sources might disagree with you. You are looking for support, but you are also looking for people who might have more in-depth information that you do to inform your argument and improve it.
- **Don't let your sources overburden your work.** Excellent source material is great, but overkill is also always a possibility. A paper that relies too much on source material can cause the voice of the paper's author to disappear. This happens sometimes because people don't have enough confidence in their ideas, so they lean on source material as a kind of crutch. It's very important to place your ideas in the larger conversation about your topic, but you don't want your ideas to be completely drowned out. The answer? Make sure that you surround every instance of source material with your own ideas. We'll explore some concrete ways to do this below.
- **At the same time, don't lose sight of your sources.** The flip side of the problem above is that some students don't rely enough on the larger conversation on their topic and can end up with an argument or ideas that get out of their control. Work hard to maintain your focus on your ideas and how your source material can support those ideas, because if you deviate too far, you could lose control of your paper and your message.

Case Study 3: Caromont Regional Medical Center's Rebranding Campaign



The *Gaston Gazette*'s photograph of the infamous slogan reveal

There are a number of examples out there that illustrate how easy – and damaging – it can be to lose sight of your source material, but the example of North Carolina's CaroMont Regional Medical Center's rebranding campaign is a painful and memorable one.

In the spring of 2013, CaroMont – located in Gaston, North Carolina –

announced a name change for the Gaston Memorial Hospital and a rebranding. The hospital, which would now be known as CaroMont Regional Medical Center, would also abandon its former tagline "In Love With Life." Its replacement? "Cheat Death."

The new tagline drew rapid and unrelenting critique from members of the public and from national news media outlets like *The Huffington Post* and *NPR*. Some were merely uncomfortable with the tagline's negative connotations; others mocked it and treated it as if it were a joke. Local residents, however, who had lost relatives at the hospital felt like the message was both demeaning and insulting: after all, they said, no one cheats death, and nowhere is that more apparent and more inescapable than at a hospital.

So what went wrong with this new campaign? In part, the fault lay with the hospital's board of directors who gave the job of creating the new tagline to Immortology, a Chapel Hill-based marketing and branding firm which many said did not do a sufficient job of vetting the proposed rebranding internally, much less among public focus groups, before launching it.

But also problematic was the fact that the impetus for changing the tagline was lost in the shuffle. Hospital board members had recently been made aware that Gaston County had scored near the bottom of the state's 99 counties and on a national level on an assessment of community health conducted annually by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. A new tagline and associated campaign, they thought, just might spur county residents to improve their health.

What made headlines here, however, was not the good intentions of the hospital board but instead the failed attempt of a firm that, according to its website, believes that "safe is for sissies," a firm that creates only "immortal" brands that "lead rather

than follow.” Unfortunately, the only thing that’s lasting about this particular story is a public relations disaster that the hospital will never quite live down.

Read more about CaroMont’s PR disaster here:

- From *Charlotte Business Journal*, “CaroMont’s ‘Cheat Death’ slogan drawing a sharp response”: <http://bit.ly/1vqaHZt>
- From *Modern Healthcare*, “Outliers: New slogan dies quick death”: <http://bit.ly/Ty3iek>

Case Study Exercises:

- 1) In the *Modern Healthcare* article, CaroMont CEO and President Randy Kelley says the hospital’s intent was “never to offend or incite.” How do you think CaroMont could have handled this differently that would have kept the public’s focus more on the health report that spurred their desire for change?
- 2) Consider what would happen if you lost sight of source material in a paper. What steps could you take to revise your paper so that your argument connected effectively with your source material again?

- **For every major claim you make in support of your thesis, try to have at least one source.** This is less a hard-and-fast rule than a suggestion. If possible, try to see if you can find a source that will support each major claim that you make in your paper. This is a challenge, but if you aim for this standard, it will help you maintain balance in your paper between reputable sources and your own ideas.
- **Make sure you indicate whether your source material is quoted, paraphrased, or summarized.** It’s very important to indicate in your paper whether you are using source material that is a quote, is being paraphrased, or being summarized. Here’s a brief description and example of each to help you understand the difference between these classifications:
 - **Quoted source material** is material that is replicated word for word in your paper. This material is always set apart by quotation marks.

Example: In his 1955 essay “Stranger in the Village,” James Baldwin wrote “but some of the men have accused *le sale negre*-behind my back-of stealing wood and there is already in the eyes of some of them that peculiar, intent, paranoiac malevolence which one sometimes surprises in the eyes of American white men when, out walking with their Sunday girl, they see a Negro male approach.”

- **Paraphrased source material** is generally a passage whose general intent and meaning is restated succinctly and faithfully in the writer's own words. Paraphrasing is typically confined to a small amount of quoted text. This material is also usually afforded some kind of introduction, and no quotation marks are typically used unless the writer feels the need to retain some of the author's original vocabulary.

Example: In his 1955 essay "Stranger in the Village," James Baldwin wrote that male residents of the Swiss village still accuse him of stealing behind his back and silently radiate the same fear and hatred that he has seen in the eyes of American men.

- **Summarized source material** is material that attempts to put the main ideas of a text succinctly and faithfully into the writer's own words. Typically, summarized source material incorporates a much larger sections of text, such as a paragraph, chapter, article, or book. As with others, this material is also afforded some kind of introduction, and no quotation marks are typically used unless the writer feels the need to retain some of the author's original vocabulary.

Example: In his 1955 essay "Stranger in the Village," James Baldwin wrote about the unsettling experience of being the only African American man in a village of 600 white Swiss villagers, the odd quietude associated with living in a remote village in the Alps in the middle of winter, the dramatic difference between the village and his hometown of Harlem, and the inescapable history of race and racism.

- **To integrate a quote, paraphrase or summary effectively, follow these three steps: introduce, insert, and explain.** The process of quote integration can be a bit tricky, especially for new writers. Although there's no real formula for doing this effectively, we've outlined a three-step process below with examples that can serve as a guide. Once they are comfortable with this approach, advanced writers can feel free to deviate from this process and use these steps in varying ways to help them construct a more complex argument.
 - **Introduce.** Try offering a two-part introductory statement that indicates to your reader important information about your source material:

- **Part I** of the introduction should introduce us to the text. It can include the title, date, or author, or if it feels relevant or important, all three.

Example: In *The Great Gatsby*, written by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925,...

Typically, you only need to offer this much information once in your paper. After the first mention, and any time you include another quote, you can simply refer to the title of the book or the author or, in some cases, you may not need to mention the title at all because it will be understood contextually.

Example: Fitzgerald's novel...or...In the novel

- **Part II** of the introduction should introduce us to the relevant quote itself. It should be a statement that gives us the context for the quote.

Example: In *The Great Gatsby*, written by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925, Gatsby's great love Daisy Buchanan and her friend Mrs. Baxter are introduced to the reader...

- **Insert.** After you've written your two-part introductory statement, you are ready to insert your quote, paraphrase, or summary. Make sure you follow all correct citation rules (see Step Four, Revise: How Do I Make It Better? on pg. ?).

Example: In *The Great Gatsby*, written by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925, Gatsby's great love Daisy Buchanan and her friend Mrs. Baxter are introduced to the reader "in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had blown back in after a short flight around the house" (27).

- **Explain.** Now that you've given relevant information about the text, relevant information about the quote, and provided your quote, you can provide a two-part explanation for the quote.
 - **Part I** is your explanation of what the quote means to you. Consider the details, images, and description in the original quote and try to put them into your own words and to explain their meaning.

Example: In *The Great Gatsby*, written by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925, Gatsby's great love Daisy Buchanan and her friend Mrs. Baxter are introduced to the reader "in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had blown back in after a short flight around the house" (27). This description depicts Daisy and Mrs. Baxter as birds, swans perhaps, elegant in white, ornamental, flighty, unable to stay in one place for too long.

- **Part II** is your explanation of why this quote is relevant to your claim. How does it support your argument? Err on the side of providing too much explanation, if possible; it's always easier to cut text out of a paper rather than try to come up with additional information.

Example: In *The Great Gatsby*, written by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925, Gatsby's great love Daisy Buchanan and her friend Mrs. Baxter are introduced to the reader "in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had blown back in after a short flight around the house" (27). This description depicts Daisy and Mrs. Baxter as birds, swans perhaps, elegant in white, ornamental, flighty, unable to stay in one place for too long. Although it seems at first like merely a frivolous and perhaps derogatory depiction of the novel's women, in fact it hints at the true nature of Daisy's character – her lack of sincerity and focus and her utter inability to care about more than appearances – that makes her one of the most damning and damaging characters in the novel.

- **Avoid these common missteps because they violate the three-step process for source material integration.** There are lots of rules that we could cite here, but these are three common mistakes that new writers make that run contrary to the three-step process we've just outlined. Read them through so that you can be aware of them and avoid them.
 - **Try not to let a quote stand on its own in a sentence.** Some writers feel like they shouldn't tamper too much with an author's words because they speak for themselves, but that's not the purpose of using them in a paper. You are using them to bolster your argument. In order to do that effectively, you have to provide context and connections to what you're writing, so it's much more effective to provide an introduction to a quote that links it seamlessly to your work.

- **Don't end a paragraph with a quote.** It's another common mistake that new writers make: end with a quote, and you'll end with the strongest possible sentiment, right? Wrong. In the end, you end up weakening your own argument because you're relying on the words of someone else to fully explain your point rather than using those words to supplement and bolster your own. Whenever possible, try to end with some kind of explanation of the quote.
- **Don't use quotes in your topic sentences.** Topic sentences are places for you to work your writerly magic – not places for the words of others. These are the sentences where you need to set forth your claims succinctly using your own thoughts and ideas. If you use source material here, you run the risk of having that source material monopolize the conversation.
- **Attribute your material appropriately – or, in other words, cite your sources.** This rule is one that's paramount. Just as you want to be given credit for your original words and thoughts, so do others. Make sure that you always cite words and ideas that are other than your own. And if you're not sure you're doing it correctly, look it up.

Case Study 4: The Fabrications of Stephen Glass



Stephen Glass photo used in 1998 Vanity Fair profile. Photo by F/Stop Studio.

Most people think of plagiarism as primarily a problem among high school and college students, but not so: in fact, there is a long and unsettling pattern of plagiarism and fabrication in the professional world, particularly in the field of journalism, that can teach us some valuable lessons about why it's so important to cite the work of others – and to tell the truth.

One of the most infamous examples of this rising trend is Stephen Glass. In 1998, Glass was 25 years old, a rising star of journalism, and an associate editor at *The New Republic* magazine. One of Glass' most appealing qualities was his uncanny ability to find the most incredible stories: about teenage computer hackers who extorted money from corporations and a conference for drunk and angry young conservatives that boasted orgies and drug fests. The only problem was the stories were almost all fabricated.

In fact, once *The New Republic's* editorial staff finally made their way through an investigation and fact-checking of all of Glass' 41 bylines for the magazine, they

discovered that 27 of his pieces contained fabrications. The staff noted that in a few cases, entire stories were invented.

Glass, of course, is not the only writer to be branded as a fabulist or a plagiarist. Former *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair and columnist Maureen Dowd have both been accused of plagiarism, and *A Million Little Pieces* author James Frey has also been accused of being a fabulist. Although there will always be people who will complete this disturbing pattern, the resulting public humiliation and guilt should be enough of a motivator to remind most of us of how important it is to credit the ideas of others and to stick to the truth.

Read more about Stephen Glass:

- From *Vanity Fair*, “Shattered Glass”: <http://vnty.fr/1ld4na>
- From Media Research Center, “The New Republic Plays the Victim”: <http://bit.ly/1qt23M7>

Case Study Exercises

- 1) Read “Shattered Glass.” What do you think Stephen Glass’ reasons were for fabricating his stories? Why not just find genuine stories to write about?
 - 2) Think carefully about the pitfalls associated with plagiarism. What steps can you take when writing your next paper to keep yourself from even accidentally plagiarizing?
- **Know which style of documentation you need to utilize.** Most professors will tell you clearly what they’re looking for, so pay attention, and if you’re not sure, ask. Most humanities classes, for example, use MLA style, and most social sciences use APA. The rules for these methods of documentation are clearly outlined in numerous books and on numerous websites, so the answers you might be looking for are readily available.

Step Four

Revise: How do I make it better?

Your paper is drafted, so it’s ready to turn in, right? Not so fast – **revising and editing** are both fruitful and necessary, and you will be well served to follow at least a few steps before turning your final draft in to your professor. In fact, many students find that their best writing happens during the revision process. Give yourself enough time to go through your paper at least once before you turn it in – you’ll be glad you did.

- **Be your own fact-checker.** This is a simple step but incredibly important. Check for:

- spelling, grammar and punctuation errors
 - the spelling of names in particular
 - the accuracy of source page numbers
 - the accuracy of quotes
- **Make sure your use of source material is balanced.** You don't want to turn in a paper that's heavily dominated with sources in one area and then devoid of sources in other areas. You want those sources to be used effectively and to be distributed relatively evenly so that your claims are supported equally by material. Remember – the use of sources is less about the number than it is about how effectively and artfully they are incorporated.
- **Polish your integration of sources.** In other words, make sure that when you integrate your source material using accurate and effective punctuation:
 - Use ellipses to shorten a quote,
 - Use parentheses for in-text citations and to indicate an error in an original quote (for example, "sic" to indicated incorrect spelling)
 - Use brackets to help clarify or explain a quote
 - Alter your grammar so that it matches the grammar in your paper