

Integrating Evidence from Other Sources into Your Writing

What is evidence?

In this handout, we use “evidence” to refer to **the information that you use to support your claims about a topic in an academic writing context**. Evidence is necessary to building an effective academic argument. In fact, in *The Craft of Research*, Booth and his colleagues call evidence “the bedrock of every argument” (130). To count as evidence, information must be facts that “readers agree not to question, at least for the purposes of the argument” (131). This view of evidence suggests that writers need to pay attention to what their audience will accept as evidence when setting out to construct an argument.

For an additional helpful overview on this topic, visit “[Evidence](#),” from the Writing Center at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

Why use evidence?

Using evidence **builds your credibility** as a writer and researcher. If you can support your ideas with evidence, your readers are more likely to accept your ideas as believable and convincing.

You may not realize it, but you likely already use evidence in conversation all the time. For instance, let’s say you and a friend are debating the best albums of all time. As you offer your suggestions for the list, you would probably supply reasons why you think those particular albums were path-breaking contributions to music.

Within academia, using appropriate evidence also signals that you are willing to play by the rules of a disciplinary community and that you want to make a contribution that others will take seriously.

What counts as evidence?

There are a wide variety of types of information that can be used as support for claims, including interviews, surveys, and experimental results. The disciplinary expectations of your audience, based in part on the genre that you are writing in, influence what counts as appropriate evidence in a given situation.

For example, in a literature class, you might be asked to write a literary analysis paper. In this case, you would likely build your argument using evidence taken from the exact language of the primary text – the novel, play, or poem you are reading for class.

Alternatively, in a college success seminar, you might be asked to write reflection papers, in which case details from your personal experiences count as relevant and appropriate evidence.

For your typical research paper, however, evidence should likely come from **relevant scholarly sources or from other reliable sources of information**, such as government reports. Consult with your instructor or a librarian if you are unsure of how to evaluate whether a source is scholarly or reliable. In short, scholarly sources are those that have gone through a process of peer review or are published by university or other well-known, academic presses, which helps to ensure that the information presented is a valid contribution to the ongoing conversation around that topic.

How should I integrate evidence into my writing?

This is a complex process, so we've broken it down into steps below.

While it is crucial to your argument, allow evidence to play a supporting role in your text.

The language of other sources should never overpower your text or supplant the control that your voice has over your material. As Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz describe in *Everything's An Argument*, your voice as the author is the most important: "You are like the conductor of an orchestra, calling upon separate instruments to work together to create a rich and coherent sound" (467). To accomplish this directing role, be sure that **your words** express your thesis statement, your topic sentences, your analysis of your evidence, and all the other connective glue that holds your paper together, relates the different pieces to one another, and makes it cohere.

Use evidence after you have expressed a claim at the beginning of a paragraph.

Integrating evidence after you have expressed a main idea is part of controlling your argument in your own words and allowing evidence to play its supporting role. For example, be careful to avoid starting a paragraph or ending a paragraph with a quotation. This may be a sign that you are relying too heavily on your evidence to do the rhetorical work of argumentation, which is really your job as the writer.

Decide whether a paraphrase or a direct quotation is more appropriate.

Paraphrasing, which we define as “putting ideas and concepts into one’s own words to help readers understand clearly” (see our “Patchwriting versus Paraphrasing” handout), is most appropriate when you are trying to convey an overall idea or argument from another source. Especially if you are asked to write in APA style, you should privilege paraphrasing over direct quotation.

Direct quotation is using the exact same words that were used in another source. This is useful when you think the exact phrasing of the original matters.

Aim to keep your paraphrase or your quotation to 1-2 sentences at most. This guideline will help you to craft body paragraphs that are well supported and well developed, because it will force you to comment on your evidence in order to complete the paragraph, and/or it allows you to link together multiple sources in the same paragraph without overwhelming the text with too much material from one source.

Remember that, no matter which you choose, **you need to cite both paraphrased material and directly quoted material.**

Use a signal phrase to contextualize your evidence.

Readers want to have some context for where evidence is coming from, so they can better evaluate for themselves whether they trust it or not. To meet this need, writers can use signal phrases that offer small bits of information about the author and/or the source of the information. You could identify the field or occupation of the author, or name the book or journal that the evidence was published in. Here’s an example of a signal phrase taken from *Everything’s An Argument*:

“According to noted primatologist Jane Goodall, the more we learn about the nature of nonhuman animals, the more ethical questions we face about their use in the service of humans” (Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz 474).

In this example, the signal phrase comes at the beginning of the sentence. While that is typical of signal phrases, you can also sometimes position them at the end of the sentence, or even in the middle as a kind of interesting interruption.

Use variety in your signal verbs.

Signal phrases often use an active verb that describes the rhetorical action that the author is doing in the quote or paraphrase that follows. It is important to carefully select your verb, so that it accurately reflects your interpretation of the standpoint of the author.

Here is a list of commonly used signal verbs, borrowed from *Everything's An Argument* (475):

acknowledges	confirms	observes
admits	criticizes	offers
advises	declares	opposes
agrees	disagrees	remarks
allows	discusses	replies
argues	disputes	reports
asserts	emphasizes	responds
believes	expresses	reveals
charges	hypothesizes	states
claims	interprets	suggests
concludes	lists	thinks
concur	objects	writes

Analyze your evidence.

After you have done the hard work of finding relevant sources, reading them carefully, selecting important evidence, and integrating it into the middle of your paragraph with a signal phrase – you are not done yet! You still need to make sense of that evidence for your reader. You need to explain it, comment on it, or analyze it in some way, to help your reader know why it is significant and relevant to your claim. Remember, as Booth and his colleagues point out, “evidence never speaks for itself” (190). It is your job as the writer to make the connections abundantly clear for your readers.

If you use a signal phrase and analyze your evidence, there should be text in your own words on either side of your evidence that contextualizes and makes sense of it.

In [their writing-related handouts](#), the Academic Success Center at Bucks County Community College calls this pattern of integrating evidence, “**sandwiching quotes**.” As the writer, you want to have explanation and set-up of the quote in your own voice, then deliver the quote, then analyze the quote back in your own voice. Try to address the **what, how, and why** of the quote:

- What does the quote say?
- How does it relate to my topic?
- Why is it important for readers to know?

Good luck and happy writing. ☺

Works Cited

Booth, Wayne C., et al. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed., U of Chicago P, 2008.

“Embedded Quotations.” Bucks County Community College Tutoring Center, August 2013,
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Lunsford, Andrea A. and John J. Ruskiewicz. *Everything's An Argument*. 8th ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2019.