

# Evidence

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# Utilizing Resources

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**One problem writers come up against when completing research assignments is how to use resources and still write something new.**

- Use gathered sources to show that you understand what you have read *and* to give your opinion on material you have read.
- Use sources to back up a statement you have made, or a critical opinion you have regarding a topic.
- *All quotes or paraphrases must be analyzed or explained why they are in the paper. Never simply embed a quote and expect the material to explain itself.*
- Quotes from research are *not* substitutes for your own observations, nor are they a substitute for your own thoughts and analysis.
- Sources also enable you to judge or challenge old ideas, or concentrate on a controversy between sources.

# Utilizing Resources

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**Sometimes your ideas may already be established by a critic.**

If you find your idea already established by another writer:

- continue with your version in the paper, realize you found a support, someone who agrees with you.
- do not pretend you did not see the information.

Your approach will not be precisely the same as the writer who has come up with the “same” idea. Be sure to:

- indicate you found the information and introduce the writer whose work slightly mirrors your own.
- briefly indicate any differences between the two ideas.

Failure to do so constitutes a form of plagiarism, *even if you honestly arrived at your conclusions independently.*

# *Utilizing Resources*

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Overall, in a prewriting format, be able to compose multiple, original ideas on your chosen topic *before* conducting summaries, paraphrases, and quotes from other sources.

- Afterwards you want to add authoritative voices to your work to defend your observations
- Gathering evidence can be the best part of developing a research paper—this is where any detective skills and analysis abilities come in handy.
- Be sure to schedule out your available time so you are not cramming limited hours with finding resources. Plot out a working, day-by-day series of tasks.
- Remember your final project is due in Turnitin.com in a matter of weeks.

# *Utilizing Resources*

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**As stressed in other lectures, when you develop research for your papers, you want to collect information which backs up your thesis statement**

—or in other words, you need to find data which supports your claims and observations.

## **Three Important Elements for Gathering Evidence**

When writing academic papers, you want to find the following data:

*(you should know this already)*

- **facts**
- **statistics**
- **quotes**

# Utilizing Resources

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**1. facts:** examples, material proving an event or belief is a truth

- details: specific portion of a fact, these as a group make up a fact.
- examples: illustrative details which further explain how fact is a truth.

**2. statistics:** interpretations of numerical data, percentages, averages

**3. quotations:** a statement taken from a book, magazine, web site, or speech from a person of authority on your subject.

*As an example, if a student were writing a paper on a possible theory for the formation of the Earth's moon, he/she would quote Carl Sagan because he is a respected scientist in the field of astronomy.*

# *Utilizing Resources*

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## **All evidence must support your thesis.**

If a fact or detail does not relate fully to the topic, then delete it from the essay.

- irrelevant information appears as a stalling technique
- remain focused on your topic

## **Likewise keep evidence specific:**

- avoid vague information; be specific
- avoid ambiguous facts; use concrete evidence

## **Keep evidence accurate. Never:**

- **misquote nor generate facts**
- **disregard information**
- **makeup facts**

# Utilizing Resources

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- **misquote:** in other words, reinvent phrases for your sources, nor strategically arrange text so it supports your theory.
- **disregard information:** in other words do not leave out information to make your theory appear stronger.

If you disagree with a source, *do not simply avoid the issue, and backup your point with other complementary facts.*

*Use the opportunity to point out any weakness in the opposition*

> although these papers are not primarily persuasion pieces, elements of this type of discussion will emerge in situations of heavy debate

- **makeup facts or details:** this is not creative writing.



# *Utilizing Resources*

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Finally, to avoid plagiarism, always acknowledge where you find

- another author's observations and concepts
- any statistics or numerical data
- unusual data:

Immanuel Velikovsky in his book *Worlds in Collision* proposes that the planet Venus was created from particles ejected from the large planet Jupiter.

# *Biased Sources*

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**Most importantly, you need to consider the seriousness or scholarly attitude of all resources.**

Casual observations and biased opinions affect the tone of academic papers.

- the writer you use as a reference should be open to opposing ideas
- does not distort evidence
- a biased source will often only use limited, very specific evidence to support their conclusions
- *usually emotionally charged language is a good sign of biased attitudes*
- special interest groups for a particular industry is a biased source
  - > political groups, religious organizations, specialized industries are usually biased.

# *Biased Sources*

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A good example, if you were doing a paper on dangers of second-hand smoke you would not look for information a web site sponsored by the tobacco industry. Even if it sounds like they are following your thesis.

- Reading such material *can* give you a specific point regarding your topic; however, *it should not be your main source of information.*
- If the information is crucial to your research, always acknowledge a biased source in your paper *and state why it is used*
- Most important, do not let your own personal biases come into play. Try not to favor one position over another just because it works with your thesis.
- You might find a modification of your thesis is in order.

# *Biased Sources*

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- It is okay for the resources to modify your feelings on a subject.  
The more you learn the less conclusive you will find your paper.
- This is a sign you are weighing all the evidence.
- Another way of looking at it: you want to be the perfect impartial juror;  
without a strong unchangeable opinion before you go in to the topic.

# Statistics

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## Basic Requirements Regarding Statistics:

- These do reinforce your points.
- Make sure you copy these numbers *accurately*.
- State when the evidence was gathered. It should be possible to determine *how* the evidence was gathered and by *whom*.
- Always check that the source is not “spinning” the numbers to give out a misinterpretation of the facts.

*For example if 80% of Americans think violent crime is our number one national problem, that does not mean violent crime is our main problem.*

# Statistics

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- Be sure to determine what the source means by majority.  
Fifty-one percent is a majority, over forty-nine percent, but that's a *bare* majority.
- Statistics can fall into the territory of biases.
- If the source is taking an emotional stance, regard the work with skepticism.  
Be sure the numbers are being reported fairly.
- Finally be sure the source indicates the number of respondents.  
They may say ninety percent of people sampled believe a politician with an extramarital affair should not be President; however, if the poll was taken outside a church on Sunday and only ten people are polled, then the statistics are meaningless.