

Lecture 5

Choosing and Evaluating Sources

Graduation Project

To help you choose your sources, ask yourself the following questions

- ❖ What do I know about the author?
- ❖ What do I know about the publisher?
- ❖ Is my research reasonably balanced?
- ❖ Are my sources reporting valid research?
- ❖ Is your source the original researcher or is he or she reporting someone else's study?
- ❖ If the information is being reported secondhand, has your source been accurate and clear? Is the original source named or referenced in some way so that the information could be checked?
- ❖ Are my sources still current?

Taking Notes:

Direct quotations. ❖

Paraphrase. ❖

Summary. ❖

Your own ideas. ❖

Distinguishing Paraphrase from Summary

Paraphrase

A *paraphrase* puts the information in the researcher's own words, but it does follow the order of the original text, and it does include the important details.

Summary

A *summary* is generally much shorter than the original; the researcher picks out the key ideas but often omits many of the supporting details.

REMEMBER:

Both paraphrased and summarized ideas must be attributed to their sources, even if you do not reproduce exact words or figures.

Incorporating Your Source Material

Be aware that a research paper is not a massive collection of quotations and paraphrased or summarized ideas glued together with a few transitional phrases. It is, instead, an essay in which YOU offer your thesis and ideas based on and supported by YOUR research. Consequently, you will need to incorporate and blend in your reference material in a variety of smooth, persuasive ways. Here are some suggestions:

Use your sources in a clear, logical way:

Make certain that you understand your source material well enough to use it in support of your own thoughts. Once you have selected the best references to use, be as convincing as possible. Ask yourself if you're using enough evidence and if the information you're offering really does clearly support your point. As in any essay, you need to avoid oversimplification, hasty generalizations, *non sequiturs*, and other problems in logic. Resist the temptation to add quotations, facts, or statistics that are interesting but not really relevant to your paper.

An Example of non-sequitur arguments

1. All men are humans.
2. Mary is human.
3. Therefore, Mary is a man.

Don't overuse direct quotations. It's best to use a direct quotation only when it expresses a point in a far more impressive, emphatic, or concise way than you could say it yourself.

When you do decide to use direct quotations, don't merely drop them in your prose as if they had fallen from a tall building onto your page. Instead, lead into them smoothly so that they obviously support or clarify what you are saying.

See next slide for examples.

Dropped in

Scientists have been studying the ill effects of nitrites on test animals since 1961. "Nitrites produced malignant tumors in 62 percent of the test animals within six months" (Smith 109).

Better

Scientists have been studying the ill effects of nitrites on test animals since 1961. According to Dr. William Smith, head of the Farrell Institute of Research, who conducted the largest experiment thus far, "Nitrites produced malignant tumors in 62 percent of the test animals within six months" (109).

Vary your sentence pattern when you present your quotations

Here are some sample phrases for quotations:

In her introduction to *The Great Gatsby*, Professor Wilma Smith points out that Fitzgerald "wrote about himself and produced a narcissistic masterpiece" (5).

Wilma Smith, author of *Impact*, summarized the situation this way: "Eighty-eight percent of the sales force threaten a walkout" (21).

"Only the President controls the black box," according to the White House Press Secretary Wilma Smith.

Vary your sentence pattern when you present your quotations

As drama critic Wilma Smith observed last year in *The Saturday Review*, the play was "a rousing failure" (212).

Perhaps the well-known poet Wilma Smith expressed the idea best when she wrote, "Love is a spider waiting to entangle its victims" (14).

"Employment figures are down 3 percent from last year," claimed Senator Wilma Smith, who leads opposition to the tax cut (32).

In other words, don't simply repeat "Wilma Smith said," "John Jones said," "Mary Brown said."

Punctuate your quotations correctly

The proper punctuation will help your reader understand who said what. Examples:

If you are incorporating a long quoted passage into your essay, one that appears as more than four typed lines in your manuscript, you should present it in block form without quotation marks. To omit words in a quoted passage, use ellipsis marks.

Make certain your support is in the paper, not still in your head or back in the original source.

Don't let reference material dominate your essay. Remember that your reader is interested in *your* thesis and *your* conclusions, not just in a string of references. Use your researched material wisely whenever your statements need clarification, support, or amplification. But don't use quotations, paraphrased, or summarized material at every turn, just to show that you've done your homework.