

TAKE CHARGE: INTEGRATING SOURCE MATERIAL

Assuming you've selected solid sources, your researched material, properly used, can add authority to your paper and credibility to *you*, the author. Remember that it's your paper. Your sources may be experts, but you're the author. Keep control. Here are some tips for integrating your researched material correctly and effectively:

- Compose a tentative works cited before you begin to draft. Check it for correct form so that you can do your in-text citations easily as you draft, avoiding inadvertent plagiarism.
- Avoid the *all-I-got-from-source A* followed by *all-I-got-from-source B* approach in all writing situations. Present all source material as it's relevant to a subtopic you're developing in informative writing **or** to a particular argumentative point of yours in persuasive writing.
- Don't let source material become a be-all. Again, it's *your* paper. Use good topic sentences to introduce a subtopic, your argumentative point, or paragraph/passage. Tie in source material firmly with your own comment/analysis. Avoid debate-chairing (letting your experts argue for you while you stay uninvolved, practiced by some writers worried about expressing their own ideas). College is the time to try 'em out!
- Avoid quote-quilts, a cousin of debate-chairing. Practice acceptable paraphrasing, and prefer paraphrasing and summary of source material. *Keep direct quotations to a minimum*, especially long ones.
- Use graceful signal phrases to introduce your sources; include a source's credentials at first mention for added authority.
- Avoid including unnecessary information in signal phrases. No need to include titles (unless you'll cite two or more by the same author) and publication names in formally documented texts. Complete publishing data is in the works cited, and awkward, wordy attributions (signals) clog up the flow of your discourse.
- Remember a source's opinion *is just that*--and is *only as good as what it's based on* and *as good as the source's reputation*. Don't appear to swallow opinion as if it were fact. When possible, show what that opinion is based on.
- Enter research with an open mind; *don't engage in lopsided research* (e.g., don't seek out sources that agree with your prefabricated thesis). In persuasion, you'll have to answer those opposing views and reader concerns anyway--or your readers will think you ill-informed. When informing on a controversial issue, you'll need to cover all sides.
- Vary verbs of attribution, remembering they're in the present tense in MLA for print sources.
- Play nice. Maintain a civil tone, and avoid *ad hominem* attacks on sources you don't agree with. (Of course you wouldn't.)