

Tips for Incorporating Sources



What do I do with all these sources I have to include? There are two major areas to consider when you're writing something that involves others' ideas and arguments: 1. What function does that other idea have in your argument? 2. When and how should that idea be expressed in your argument? Here are some suggestions for addressing these considerations.

How can I use other people's ideas?: An incomplete list of possibilities

- As the other **stakeholders** in the conversation you're entering (what others have said about your topic)
- As your **primary data**
- As a **lens** or perspective you use to analyze your primary data

Stakeholder ideas are most likely useful in the following ways:

- Introduction: to establish that your topic is important to people and to convey the particular questions or concerns people have about your topic (that you will address in some way through your essay).
- Analysis/Discussion: to connect your observations and analysis of data with specific questions, concerns, or findings other people have or have made about your topic
- Discussion/Conclusion: to connect your takeaway message with the conversation people are having on your topic, especially in terms of where it should go next, now that your voice is part of the discussion.

How to integrate stakeholder ideas:

- Fully explain where that idea comes from: your reader should be able to identify the source (author, date, title of work, page—if those details are available to you).
- Fully explain how that idea earned a spot in your paper: what authority does the source have, what does it contribute to the conversation about your topic.
- Quote or Paraphrase? Depends on what style you're writing in. See page 2 for advice for APA (and other science-y styles), CMS, and MLA expectations.

Primary data ideas are most likely useful in the following ways:

- Results: the quotes and information you gather from primary research. Depending on your field of study, primary data may come from the main texts you're writing about, interviews or surveys, or experimental results. You need these data to explain and support any claims you want to make in your paper.
- Analysis/Discussion: to connect your analysis with specific details of your data. In APA and other science-y formats, this move gets its own section. In MLA and CMS, integrate analysis of data with the data, so readers know promptly why you included that primary data.
- What is primary data? Depends on what field you're writing in. See page 2 for advice for fields that use APA (and other science-y styles), CMS, and MLA expectations.

How to integrate primary data ideas:

- You may want to include direct quotes if relevant; or tables, charts, or other visual representations of the data you collected through your research; or neutral summaries of your observations.
- When analyzing or discussing the data, you may want to quote specific phrases or results. Be sure your reader can identify where that data point came from, and why you're quoting it at this point in your argument.

Lens ideas are most likely useful in the following ways:

- Introduction: to introduce the idea that will serve as a lens, and to discuss the validity or relevance of that perspective to your topic
- Method: to explain how you use the lens to analyze and understand your primary data. For styles that do not label a Method section (APA does; MLA and CMS do not), be sure to explain your lens ideas before you start applying them.
- Analysis/Discussion: to explain the significance of what the lens revealed about your data

How to integrate lens ideas:

- For broad ideas, if there is a generally accepted definition for the concept you can paraphrase that definition when you first introduce the concept.
- For someone's specific definition, quote it when you first introduce the concept, then be sure to explain the details of the definition in your own words, so your reader can easily understand how you intend to use that concept.
- After the initial introduction, you can usually use the key terms from the lens without quoting during analysis/discussion; if you want to connect to a specific part of the lens idea, though, and your lens is someone's specific definition, you may want to quote just that piece.
- If your analysis reveals a limitation of the lens (which is one way for your work to be significant to the conversation), you may want to quote the part of the lens idea that your work challenges in your Discussion/Conclusion.

Stakeholder Ideas: APA

In APA and other science-y styles, paraphrasing is strongly preferred, because the reader is interested in how ideas are generalizable, how they might be applied in different contexts; most stakeholder ideas are about facts, which can be paraphrased.

Stakeholder Ideas: CMS

In Chicago style (CMS), paraphrasing of stakeholder ideas is strongly preferred, because the reader is interested in how your analysis creates a new understanding of the sources from the period or event you're writing about; quoting is usually reserved for those primary sources.

Stakeholder Ideas: MLA

In MLA style, quoting or paraphrasing are equally valid ways of addressing stakeholder ideas; some stakeholder ideas are facts, which can be paraphrased, but many are claims about the topic, and the exact wording of those claims is important.

Primary Data: APA

In APA and other science-y formats, primary data (from interviews, surveys, or other texts you want to use to develop and support your argument) can be expressed directly in the Results section.

Primary Data: CMS

In CMS, primary data comes from texts created during the historical period you're writing about. Usually, you paraphrase the information from the text to support your claim about the significance of the document to your argument. When the specific language in the document is necessary to your argument, you may want to quote. As in MLA, your analysis will usually come both before and after the data to show your readers why that data is important to your paper.

Primary Data: MLA

In MLA style, primary data usually comes from the main text or texts you're writing about, whether those are books, poems, films, or paintings. When possible, quote primary data, because the way something is stated is usually as important as the ideas for literary and textual analysis. For non-verbal texts (like paintings, or for details in a film), describe the detail as clearly as possible. When you quote, include only as much of the quote as you analyze. Your analysis will usually come both before and after the data: often, you'll start with a claim that you want your data to support, then include your data, then analyze the data to explain exactly how it supports the claim.

Resources for further reading

For more details about citing sources, see [MLA Style Center](#), [APA Style](#), [CMS Online](#).
