Do’s and Don’ts of Combining Your Viewpoints and Research

Chances are, you are not the first person who has written something related to your topic and you won’t be the last. Research topics are always evolving through scientific studies, media, politics, etc. Your unique views should respond to current viewpoints and research related to your topic. You are entering an ongoing conversation, so what you say should be relevant and informed.

First, ask yourself:

What research has already been done on my topic?

How does the public view my topic?

Search Google, news publications, and the library’s databases for information.

Then, narrow your research to what is current, valid, and relevant.

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**Don’t:** 🡪 Use a source without reading it

 🡪 Skim the text until you find a sentence relevant to your research

Important: You may have heard your professor say, “Don’t cherry pick quotes!” Yes, that means you can’t use a source if you haven’t read the source or don’t know how the author feels about your topic. Instead of skimming the article or source and looking for a section of text that you agree with, take the time to read the source in its entirety. If it’s a book, you can narrow it down to chapters that are relevant to your research.

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**Do:** Examine the following in each source:

🡪Authors, researchers, organizations involved

🡪The author’s motivation for writing the piece

🡪 Research/ideas that relate to your viewpoint

🡪Arguments the author makes \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

To fully analyze your source, you should read it several times.

First, read the entire piece and **play the “believing game.”**

* Try to completely believe the writer’s viewpoint
* Place yourself in the writer’s shoes
* Try to summarize the argument without agreeing or disagreeing

Next, read the source again and **play the “doubting game.”**

* Identify parts of the writer’s argument that you disagree with—How does the argument differ from your thesis?
* Look for gaps in the argument—Are there places where the author should have included more information?
* Evaluate the writer’s overall argument—Are you convinced that the argument is completely valid? What parts of the argument would skeptics question?

Finally, read their source again with your **thesis** in mind.

* Compare the author’s argument to yours—What parts of the argument support yours? What parts of the argument challenge yours?
* Identify what matters to your argument—Highlight or underline sections that are useful to your argument. This will be useful when incorporating the research into your paper.
* Disregard the parts that are completely irrelevant. The source might include information about a topic that you aren’t discussing. For example, the source, “Shakespeare’s Play with Perspective: Sonnet 24, Hamlet, Lear” discusses three works, but only the discussion about Hamlet is relevant to your paper. Highlight or underline the sections that apply to your argument and topic.

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After reading the source several times, consider the following when including the author’s ideas in your paper:

**Do:** 🡪 Be respectful of others’ research by fully explaining their point of view

Be sure to fully explain the writer’s point of view. Ask yourself if the writer would agree with your connection of his/her research and your argument. You should not manipulate what the author says to support what you want to say.

**Do:** 🡪Determine if the information supports/disagrees with your argument, or does both

You should include this information by writing sentences, such as:

 1) supports this argument by stating, “ .”

 2) The evidence shows that .

 3) ’s assertion that is not supported by the facts.

 4) challenges this argument by stating, “ .”

5) supports that , but also questions .

**Do:** 🡪Explain to your reader why you are using this source and why it’s relevant

You can use the following templates to explain the relevance of your research:

1) Ultimately, what is at stake here is .

2) These conclusions/findings have significant implications for .

For example, if you are writing a paper that discusses the writing skills of high school students, you can include a national report about writing with a sentence like this: *According to Writing Next, multitudes of students graduate high school though they lack the basic writing skills necessary to succeed in colleges and workplaces; other adolescents fail to complete high school because they do not have the literacy skills necessary to understand the content (Graham & Perin, 2007).* *Ultimately, what is at stake here is the literacy of young adults in the professional world.*

**Do:** 🡪 Consider using research that doesn’t fully support your thesis

Templates for using research that doesn’t support your argument:

1) Here many would probably object that .

2) Of course, many will disagree on the grounds that .

3) Some might say that , but .

For example, in a political science paper, it may be important to discuss an opposing party’s viewpoint on a controversial topic. *The Democrats argue that millionaires should pay higher taxes*, *but Republicans claim tax increases for the wealthy are unjust and will ultimately stifle economic growth.*

**Don’t:** 🡪Assume the author agrees/disagrees with you

**Don’t:** 🡪 Manipulate what the author says for what you want to say

If you assume the author agrees with you, you may misinterpret his or her view. When taking notes and writing the research paper, DO NOT MANIPULATE A SOURCE’S WORDS AND IDEAS. In other words, **do not leave out or add critical words that change the author’s point of view on the topic so that it “agrees” with your point of view.** This is academic misconduct and could result in a failing grade. Always be aware of the context in which the author is writing in; this can change the entire meaning of an idea that seems perfect for your paper.

For example, an author who writes an article about the benefits of hunting for the environment may note the following:

*Hunting is an activity that can be abused and manipulated to excuse the murder of many endangered animals. However, when practiced lawfully and respectfully, it is an endeavor that is needed for our environment to keep down the population of starving animals during the winter.*

You, however, decide to use only the first sentence in your paper to support your argument about the perils of hunting. This is a form of academic misconduct because you are taking an author’s ideas out of context to support your argument that is entirely opposite of the author’s own. You are misrepresenting the author of that source’s ideas.

**Don’t:** 🡪 Lose sight of your original viewpoint

Revisit your argument after you read each source. You should show your reader the whole picture. Readers will not see the connections you are making between the research and your argument unless you explicitly state it. **Write a sentence that clearly shows the connection between your thesis and the information you included from the source.**

Example Thesis: *It has been argued that the Porter scene in Macbeth serves as comic relief to alleviate the tension created by Duncan’s murder, but Shakespeare uses this scene to ask the audience to think critically about Porter’s viewpoints of the sins of humankind.*

Example Connecting Sentence: *Overall, Harcourt proves that Shakespeare wants the reader to condemn Macbeth for his repeated brutality by bestowing the role of an articulate speaker onto the Porter as he describes the sins of humankind.* This sentence explains how Harcourt’s main argument relates to your thesis.

**Don’t:** 🡪 Change your opinion with every source you read

If you find this difficult, freewrite your argument before you begin research. It is important to know what you think before you are persuaded by others. It is more difficult to use someone else’s argument than it is to support your own. If you cannot find any research that supports your argument, ask your professor if you are on track, or visit the Reference desk in the Library for help finding sources. If you cannot find sources, your argument’s validity might need to be examined.

 **Don’t:** 🡪 Limit summary to only one sentence

It often requires more than one sentence to fully introduce research and relate it to your argument. You don’t want to leave your reader questioning why you included a piece of information.

**Do: 🡪**Include a citation each time you refer to a source

 Make sure you follow the guidelines for MLA, APA, or Chicago Style to give proper credit to your sources for their ideas (whether they are quoted, paraphrased, or summarized).

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The College of Saint Rose Writing Center, 2013

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