

Developing Your Scholarly and Textual Authority through the Use of Strong Citation Packages

From WWU English 101 Program

Scholarly and Textual Authority

Most professors expect students to show they have given careful thought to the subjects they are writing about. They are not looking for your opinions. They are looking for informed ideas, theories, and arguments based on your studied examination and careful reasoning about the data and what other people say about the data.

In the humanities, the “data” often comes from other texts. These texts include *primary* texts (a literary work, a historical document, a painting, political speech, a film, etc.), and *secondary* texts—texts that respond to other texts. For example, *Battlestar Galactica* is a primary text. Perrault’s story of Little Red Riding Hood is a primary text. All the texts written about this fairy tale or TV show (blogs, web pages, letters to the editor, essays, criticism, etc) are secondary texts. A secondary text can respond to a primary text or another secondary text (or both).

So, experts in history not only have to study the primary texts of the historical record, they also have to be aware of other historians’ interpretations of these records. Literary scholars not only study specific literary works, they also study the criticism and theories written about these works. You are not only reading different versions of your fairy tales, you are also researching what the critics say about your fairy tale. In other words, in order to “join the conversation” about a subject you have to be aware of what others have said and written about it. The more familiar you are with the actual conversation surrounding your subject, the more “authoritative” your own perspective becomes.

Different disciplines have different methods and expectations for working with outside sources and texts. Nonetheless, no matter what discipline you are working in, your citations must be well-chosen and smoothly integrated into your own writing.

Citation Packages: a method for developing your scholarly and rhetorical authority

A “dropped quotation” is a citation that appears in a text without having been first introduced, contextualized, or explained. Inexperienced writers often “drop” or insert quotations into their paper, expecting them to be self-explanatory and to speak for themselves. One way to avoid the dropped quote is construct a “citation package” (pardon the hokey terminology) around your source information. Citation packages allow you to integrate information from others seamlessly into your own sentences. This convention is especially important for the kinds of essays you are likely to write in the humanities

Here is a four-part citation package

1. The first part (or “**lead-in**”) introduces the author, the title of the text you’re referring to, and briefly prefaces his or her ideas. The first time you cite another author, always use the writer’s full name. After that, refer to the writer by his/her last name only.
2. The second part consists of the actual quotation, paraphrase, or summary of something the writer has said about your subject.
3. When you directly “quote” what another writer says, follow that quote with a brief explanation of what the writer is saying in the quote and the context or conditions in which the writer is saying it—*before moving on to part 4*. This step is important because you can’t assume that your readers will understand on their own a quotation that has been lifted from another source. (Students often make the mistake of assuming that they are *only* writing to the teacher and the teacher will understand what the quotation means). Second, you want to show your readers *how* you have understood the quotation or how you have “come to terms” with its meaning in the way the original writer intended. In other words, you haven’t taken what the writer has said out of context and thus distorted the meaning and intention.

4. Finally, you “lead out” of the citation by showing how the writer’s ideas connect to the point you want to make. (This “**lead-out**” is often called a “warrant” because it explains what the data or evidence means in terms of your own argument).

This strategy of using a citation package requires that you fully explain and elaborate the ideas and concepts you are using (both your own and the writers you are citing); it means making a coherent link between what your source says and what you are saying for your readers.

Example:

In his essay, “Walt Disney’s Civilizing Mission: From Revolution to Restoration, noted fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes enumerates how Disney revised the Grimm Brother’s version of *Snow White* to “suit his tastes and beliefs” (203). **Zipes lists seven ways Disney alters the story in his film, including giving the cheerful, hardworking (and wealthy) dwarfs (the characters most like Disney himself) a more prominent role in the story.** At the same Zipes notes that Disney was the “perfect ‘disciple” for the Grimm Brothers 19th century ideology because of the way he both “preserved and carried on” their “benevolent stereotypical attitudes toward women” (204). **Not only did Disney retain many of the Victorian notions of “woman’s place,” he went further and celebrated these ideas with dance and song.** *Zipes’ discussion of the ways Disney both selectively adhered to certain ideologies inherent in the Grimm’s’ versions while transforming characters and events to mirror his own worldview suggests one reason why fairy tales are continually reshaped, but seldom completely transformed. Certain elements and features attract us to particular stories in the first place. Grimms’ tales adhered to many of Disney’s beliefs and provided him with a platform to add his own more than other versions might have. . . blah, blah, blah and so on. . .*

Points to remember about integrating and citing other sources

- Only quote information that is “quotable,” that is, when somebody says something better than you could say it yourself or when you want to capture the tone and style of another writer. For all other work, paraphrase or summarize (accurately).
- Always introduce and explain the texts you are quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing. Notice that the explanation can sometimes require three or four sentences (or more).
- Wherever possible, try to integrate and weave quotations into your own actual sentences.
- Use block quotes sparingly.
- Be careful not to take your quoted material out of context from what the author really meant.
- Make sure that your citations perform real intellectual work in your text. If your essay could just as easily be understood without any of the cited material, then you are simply quote-dropping.
- Make sure to follow the appropriate citation system for the discipline in which you are writing. We will be using the MLA system of parenthetical citations.
- If you use the author’s name to lead into your citation, you do not have to use it again in the parentheses. You simply write the page number (290). The period goes after the parentheses. (Notice, that you do not write the word “pg.” or “p.”—just the number).
- If you do not lead in with the author’s name, you would follow the quotation with the author’s last name and page number like this: (Edmundson 289). There is no comma between the author and the page number.