

SECONDARY SOURCES

The term Secondary Source refers to any material which an author uses which is not their own.

Secondary Sources include:

Books
Articles
Reviews
Abstracts
Images
Films
Audio Clips
Blogs
Government Publications
Pamphlets
Dissertations/Theses
Information from Radio or Television
Letters
Lectures

Secondary sources, when appropriately chose, come from experts, scholars, and commentators. Secondary sources are useful, since secondary sources are regarded as a form of testimony (a form of natural support).

We use secondary sources to help to insure our ideas are valid, truthful, and well-supported by borrowing information from these sources and using it in our papers.

THREE WAYS TO BORROW INFORMATION

We can use secondary sources to construct three structures:

- 1) Quotes from the original source (again, a form of testimony)
- 2) Paraphrases of the original source
- 3) Summaries of the original source

These three structures help our readers to have additional support for our claims, as well have the information needed find our original sources. Therefore, it is useful to have secondary sources.

ALWAYS USE A CITATION

Every time an individual uses a secondary source, he/she must also make sure to use parenthetical citations after the summary, quote, or paraphrase, and make sure to place a bibliographic citation for the source at the end of the paper.

But, why do we do this?

Let's say that you wrote an essay about the Christian Apocrypha (a very controversial topic for many people), and a reader was interested in learning more about this topic (by consulting the original sources that you used), he/she could easily read over the bibliographic citations (a citation which includes information such as the author's name, the title of the text, and other information relevant to locating the original source) and find the information that they need to locate the original source.

With such a sensitive topic to many, readers might not trust what one author has written about the topic, and readers might want to acquire the original material. Thus, documenting your source with parenthetical citations and bibliographic citations is extremely important.

HOW MUCH SECONDARY SUPPORT SHOULD WE USE?

Depending on your assignment, you can use several sources to support your paper (by borrowing the material in the form of a summary, quote, or paraphrase).

You should only use secondary sources when your perspective, your personal interpretation, or your primary research does not help to validate your claim.

You are probably asking: How much secondary support should I use?
Well, consider this:

In a creative work or in a narrative, you would use about 100% of your own thoughts (original material).

In a referential work, you would use more secondary source material. For example, you might use about 70% of your own thoughts and about 30% of your secondary material or observed material (in the form of comments, summaries, quotations, and paraphrases).

In an analytical work, you should use about 40% of the original source, which you are analyzing (providing textual evidence through direct quotation), and about 60% of your thoughts (used to provide an analysis and commentary of the work you are analyzing).

In an argumentative work, you should use a strong mix, which will vary depending on your topic (whether very personal or very public). With a personal topic, the ratio is probably 80% of your own thoughts with 20% secondary source material (in the form of summaries, quotes, and paraphrases). With a very public or very controversial topic, the ratio is probably closer to using 70% of your own thoughts with 30% secondary source material.

Again, regardless of how much secondary source material you use, make sure to always comment after the material you borrow (summarize, quote, or paraphrase), and always include a citation after you use another person's words/thoughts.

Remember: Never ever use quotations or paraphrases back to back, or on top of each other, or next to each other. This usage offers an instructor a clear indication that you are not doing as much work as you are supposed to be doing. So, make sure to include commentary following your use of borrowed material.