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## **Course Title**

Communication  
The Research Process

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## **Instructor**

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**Credit**  
3 PDU

**Questions**  
20

## Adaptation Statement

- *“Introduction to Professional Communications” was adapted and remixed by Melissa Ashman from several open textbooks as indicated at the end of each chapter. Unless otherwise noted, Introduction to Professional Communications is (c) 2018 by Melissa Ashman and is licensed under a Creative Commons-Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International license. In 2019, the textbook was updated. In 2020, minor updates were done to chapter 5.2. The adaptation statement below and all chapter attribution statements have been updated accordingly.*
- *In “Introduction to Professional Communications”, examples have been changed to Canadian references, and information throughout the book, as applicable, has been revised to reflect Canadian content and language. Gender neutral language (they/their) has been used intentionally. In addition, while general ideas and content may remain unchanged from the sources from which this adapted version is based, word choice, phrasing, and organization of content within each chapter may have changed to reflect this author’s stylistic preferences.*
- *This course consists of Part 2 titled “The Research Process” that comprises six chapters: 2.1 (Research Questions), 2.2 (Categorizing Sources), 2.3 (Evaluating Sources), 2.4 (Citing Sources), 2.5 (Making an Argument) and 2.6 (Annotated Bibliography). They are adapted from the said book titled “Introduction to Professional Communications”, which can be downloaded for free from the following link:  
<https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/professionalcomms/>*
- *The below additions or changes have been made to the chapters in this course:*
  - Chapter 2.1**
    - *Added Canadian examples*
    - *Revised examples of regular and research questions to make them relevant for a business workplace*
  - Chapter 2.2**
    - *Added social media posts and interviews with people with expertise or experience as source examples*
    - *Revised/modified some of the examples for fact vs opinion vs objective vs subjective*
    - *Used Canadian examples of popular sources*
    - *Used Canadian examples of professional sources*
  - Chapter 2.3**
    - *Added questions for reflection*
    - *Added .ca to list of domains*
  - Chapter 2.4**
    - *Expanded questions for reflection section*
  - Chapter 2.5**
    - *Added including recommendations after the conclusions of an argument*

- *As mentioned above, the book “Introduction to Professional Communications” by Melissa Ashman is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.*



- *Check additional references and sources at the end of the course.*
- *This adaptation has reformatted the original text, and have replaced some images and figures to make the course more shareable. This adaptation has not significantly altered or updated the original text.*
- *Few modifications have been made for the purpose of presenting this course on this website.*

# 2.1 Research questions

## Questions for reflection

- Think about the last time that you did research. What kind of research did you do? Were you able to find all the sources you needed? If not, what kind of sources did you struggle to find?
- How do you use the internet when you research? What kind of sites do you visit? Why?
- What does academic integrity mean to you?
- How do you determine what sources to trust online?
- If you've also attended school in a different country, how does that school system teach source use?

Both professional researchers and successful student researchers develop research questions. That's because research questions are more than handy tools; they are essential to the research process.

By defining exactly what the researcher is trying to find out, these questions influence most of the rest of the steps taken to conduct the research. That's true even if the research is not for academic purposes but for other areas of our lives.

For instance, if you're seeking information about a health problem in order to learn whether you have anything to worry about, research questions will make it possible for you to more effectively decide whether to seek medical help—and how quickly.

Or, if you're researching a potential employer, having developed and used research questions will mean you're able to more confidently decide whether to apply for an internship or job there.

The confidence you'll have when making such decisions will come from knowing that the information they're based on was gathered by conscious thought rather than serendipity and whim.

## Narrowing a topic

For many students, having to start with a research question is the biggest difference between how they did research in high school and how they are required to carry out their university research projects. It's a process of working from the outside in: you start with the world of all possible topics (or your assigned topic) and narrow down until you've focused your interest enough to be able to tell precisely what you want to find out, instead of only what you want to "write about."

## Process of narrowing a topic

Visualize narrowing a topic as starting with all possible topics and choosing narrower and narrower subsets until you have a specific enough topic to form a research question.

**All possible topics** – You'll need to narrow your topic in order to do research effectively. Without specific areas of focus, it will be hard to even know where to begin.

**Assigned topics** – Ideas about a narrower topic can come from anywhere. Often, a narrower topic boils down to deciding what's interesting to you. One way to get ideas is to read background information in a source like Wikipedia.

**Topic narrowed by initial exploration** – It's wise to do some more reading about that narrower topic to a) learn more about it and b) learn specialized terms used by professionals and scholars who study it.

**Topic narrowed to research question(s)** – A research question defines exactly what you are trying to find out. It will influence most of the steps you take to conduct the research.

## Background reading

It's wise to do some more reading about that narrower topic once you have it. For one reason, you probably don't know much about it yet. For another, such reading will help you learn the terms used by professionals and scholars who have studied your narrower topic. Those terms are certain to be helpful when you're looking for sources later, so jot them down or otherwise remember them.

For instance, if you were going to do research about the treatment for humans with bird flu, this background reading would teach you that professionals and scholars usually use the term avian influenza instead of bird flu when they write about it. (Often, they also use H1N1 or H1N9 to identify the strain.) If you didn't learn that, you would miss the kinds of sources you'll eventually need for your assignment.

Most sources other than journal articles are good sources for this initial reading, including the Globe and Mail or other mainline Canadian news outlets, Wikipedia, encyclopedias for the discipline your topic is in, dictionaries for the discipline, and manuals, handbooks, blogs, and web pages that could be relevant.

This initial reading could cause you to narrow your topic further, which is fine because narrower topics lead to greater specificity for what you have to find out. After this upfront work, you're ready to start developing the research question(s) you will try to answer for your assignment.

## Developing your research question

Because of all their influence, you might worry that research questions are very difficult to develop. Sometimes it can seem that way. But we'll help you get the hang of it and, luckily, none of us has to come up with perfect ones right off. It's more like doing a rough draft and then improving it. That's why we talk about developing research questions instead of just writing them.

## Steps for developing a research question

The steps for developing a research question, listed below, can help you organize your thoughts.

**Step 1:** Pick a topic (or consider the one assigned to you).

**Step 2:** Write a narrower/smaller topic that is related to the first.

**Step 3:** List some potential questions that could logically be asked in relation to the narrow topic.

**Step 4:** Pick the question that you are most interested in.

**Step 5:** Revise question you're interested in so that it is more focused and less vague.

After you think of each research question, evaluate it by asking whether it is:

- Logically related to the topic
- In question form
- Not answerable with a quick Google search
- Specific, not vague

Sometimes the first draft of a research question is still too broad, which can make your search for sources more challenging. Refining your question to remove vagueness or to target a specific aspect of the topic can help.

Most of us look for information to answer questions every day, but research questions are different from what we might call "regular questions."

#### **Regular question**

What time does the movie start?

Who invented the first computer?

What is social media?

Which store in my neighbourhood has the lowest priced produce?

#### **Research question**

How can movie theatres use attendance and sales data to inform scheduling of upcoming films?

Why is the lifespan of new technologies decreasing?

Why is social media an important tool to use in post-secondary classrooms?

How does the location of a store affect the types and prices of produce offered for sale?

## **Attributions**

This chapter contains information taken from multiple sources:

- [The Purpose of Research Questions](#), [Narrowing a Topic](#), [Background Reading](#), [Developing your Research Question](#), and [Regular vs Research Questions](#) in [Choosing & Using Sources: A Guide to Academic Research](#), which is used under a [CC-BY 4.0 International license](#)
- [The Research Process](#) in [Business Writing for Everyone](#), which is used under a [CC-BY-NC 4.0 International license](#).

## 2.2 Categorizing sources

Once you have your research question, you'll need information sources to answer it and meet the other information needs of your research project.

This section about categorizing sources will increase your sophistication about them and save you time in the long run because you'll understand the "big picture". That big picture will be useful as you plan your own sources for a specific research project.

You'll usually have a lot of sources available to meet the information needs of your projects. In today's complex information landscape, just about anything that contains information can be considered a potential source.

Here are a few examples:

- Books and encyclopedias
- Websites, web pages, and blogs
- Magazine, journal, and newspaper articles
- Research reports and conference papers
- Field notes and diaries
- Social media posts
- Photographs, paintings, cartoons, and other art works
- TV and radio programs, podcasts, movies, and videos
- Illuminated manuscripts and artifacts
- Bones, minerals, and fossils
- Preserved tissues and organs
- Architectural plans and maps
- Pamphlets and government documents
- Music scores and recorded performances
- Dance notation and theater set models
- People with expertise or experience on a particular topic

With so many sources available, the question usually is not whether sources exist for your project but which ones will best meet your information needs.

Being able to categorize a source helps you understand the kind of information it contains, which is a big clue to (1) whether might meet one or more of your information needs and (2) where to look for it and similar sources.

A source can be categorized by:

- Whether it contains quantitative or qualitative information or both
- Whether the source is objective (factual) or persuasive (opinion) and may be biased
- Whether the source is a scholarly, professional or popular publication
- Whether the material is a primary, secondary or tertiary source
- What format the source is in

As you may already be able to tell, sources can be in more than one category at the same time because the categories are not mutually exclusive.

## Quantitative or qualitative

One of the most obvious ways to categorize information is by whether it is quantitative or qualitative. Some sources contain either quantitative information or qualitative information, but sources often contain both.

Many people first think of information as something like what's in a table or spreadsheet of numbers and words. But information can be conveyed in more ways than textually or numerically.

**Quantitative information** – Involves a measurable quantity—numbers are used. Some examples are length, mass, temperature, and time. Quantitative information is often called data, but can also be things other than numbers.

**Qualitative information** – Involves a descriptive judgment using concept words instead of numbers. Gender, country name, animal species, and emotional state are examples of qualitative information.

## Fact or opinion

Thinking about the reason an author produced a source can be helpful to you because that reason was what dictated the kind of information they chose to include. Depending on that purpose, the author may have chosen to include factual, analytical, and objective information. Or, instead, it may have suited their purpose to include information that was subjective and therefore less factual and analytical. The author's reason for producing the source also determined whether they included more than one perspective or just their own.

Authors typically want to do at least one of the following:

- Inform and educate
- Persuade
- Sell services or products or
- Entertain
- Combined purposes

Sometimes authors have a combination of purposes, as when a marketer decides he can sell more smart phones with an informative sales video that also entertains us. The same is true when a singer writes and performs a song that entertains us but that she intends to make available for sale. Other examples of authors having multiple purposes occur in most scholarly writing.

In those cases, authors certainly want to inform and educate their audiences. But they also want to persuade their audiences that what they are reporting and/or postulating is a true description of a situation, event, or phenomenon or a valid argument that their audience must take a particular action. In this blend of scholarly author's purposes, the intent to educate and inform is considered to trump the intent to persuade.

## Why intent matters

Authors' intent usually matters in how useful their information can be to your research project, depending on which information need you are trying to meet. For instance, when you're looking for sources that will help you actually decide your answer to your research question or evidence for your answer that you will share with your audience, you will want the author's main purpose to have been to inform or educate their audience. That's because, with that intent, they are likely to have used:

- Facts where possible.



- Multiple perspectives instead of just their own.
- Little subjective information.
- Seemingly unbiased, objective language that cites where they got the information.

The reason you want that kind of resource when trying to answer your research question or explaining that answer is that all of those characteristics will lend credibility to the argument you are making with your project. Both you and your audience will simply find it easier to believe—will have more confidence in the argument being made—when you include those types of sources.

Sources whose authors intend only to persuade others won't meet your information need for an answer to your research question or evidence with which to convince your audience. That's because they don't always confine themselves to facts. Instead, they tell us their opinions without backing them up with evidence. If you used those sources, your readers will notice and not believe your argument.

## Fact vs. opinion vs. objective vs. subjective

Need to brush up on the differences between fact, objective information, subjective information, and opinion?

**Fact** – Facts are useful to inform or make an argument.

Examples:

- The sky is blue.
- Some countries follow Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and others follow International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).
- Beethoven had a reputation as a virtuoso pianist.

**Opinion** – Opinions are useful to persuade, but careful readers and listeners will notice and demand evidence to back them up.

Examples:

- That was a good movie.
- Strawberries taste better blueberries.
- Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) are better than International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).
- Placing one space after a period is the most professional way to type messages.
- Beethoven's reputation as a virtuoso pianist is overrated.

**Objective** – Objective information reflects a research finding or multiple perspectives that are not biased.

Examples:

- "Several studies show that some font types are more easily read by people with vision impairment than others."
- "A 2017 study from Kwantlen Polytechnic University showed that adults have the same ability as toddlers in taking the perspective of another person."

**Subjective** – Subjective information presents one person or organization's perspective or interpretation. Subjective information can be meant to distort, or it can reflect educated and informed thinking. All opinions are subjective, but some are backed up with facts more than others.

Examples:

- “The simple truth is this: You should never use the Comic Sans font to write a business message.”
- “Resumes for graduating students should be as short as possible—ideally one to two pages.”

## Primary, secondary & tertiary sources

Another information category is called publication mode and has to do with whether the information is:

- First-hand information (information in its original form, not translated or published in another form).
- Second-hand information (a restatement, analysis, or interpretation of original information).
- Third-hand information (a summary or repackaging of original information, often based on secondary information that has been published).

When you make distinctions between primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, you are relating the information itself to the context in which it was created. Understanding that relationship is an important skill that you’ll need in university, as well as in the workplace. Noting the relationship between creation and context helps us understand the “big picture” in which information operates and helps us figure out which information we can depend on.

**Primary sources** – Because it is in its original form, the information in primary sources has reached us from its creators without going through any filter. We get it first-hand. Here are some examples that are often used as primary sources:

- Diaries.
- Advertisements.
- Music and dance performances.
- Eyewitness accounts
- Artworks.
- Data.
- Artifacts such as tools, clothing, or other objects.
- Original documents such as tax returns, marriage licenses, and transcripts of trials.
- Journal articles that report original research for the first time (the parts about the new research, plus their data).

**Secondary sources** – These sources are translated, repackaged, restated, analyzed, or interpreted from a primary source. Thus, the information comes to us second-hand, or through at least one filter. Here are some examples that are often used as secondary sources:

- All nonfiction books and magazine articles other than autobiography.
- An article or website that critiques a novel, play, painting, or piece of music.
- An article or web site that synthesizes expert opinion and several eyewitness accounts for a new understanding of an event.
- The literature review portion of a journal article.

**Tertiary sources** – These sources further repackage the original information because they index, condense, or summarize the original. Tertiary sources are usually publications that you are not intended to read from cover to cover but to dip in and out of for the information you need. You can think of them as a good place for background information to start your research but a bad place to end up. Here are some examples that are often used as tertiary sources:

- Almanacs.
- Dictionaries.
- Guide books.
- Survey articles.
- Timelines.
- Bibliographies.
- Encyclopedias, including Wikipedia.
- Most textbooks.

### **Is it a primary source or a secondary source?**

Deciding whether to consider a journal article a primary or a secondary source can be complicated for at least two reasons.

First, journal articles that report new research for the first time are usually based on data. Some disciplines consider the data to be the primary source, and the journal article that describes and analyzes them is considered a secondary source.

However, particularly in the sciences, the original researcher might find it difficult or impossible (they might not be allowed) to share the data. Sometimes you have nothing more first-hand than the journal article, which argues for calling it the relevant primary source because it's the closest thing that exists to the data.

Second, even journal articles that announce new research for the first time usually contain more than data. They also typically contain secondary source elements, such as a literature review, bibliography, and sections on data analysis and interpretation. They can actually be a mix of primary and secondary elements. Even so, in some disciplines, a journal article that announces new research findings for the first time is considered to be, as a whole, a primary source for the researchers using it.

What are considered primary and secondary sources can vary from discipline to discipline. If you are required to use primary sources for your research project, before getting too deep into your project check with your professor to make sure they agree with your choices. A librarian, too, can verify your choices.

## **Popular, professional & scholarly sources**

We can also categorize information by the expertise of its intended audience. Considering the intended audience—how expert one has to be to understand the information—can indicate whether the source has sufficient credibility and thoroughness to meet your need.

There are varying degrees of expertise:

**Popular** – Popular newspaper and magazine articles (such as *The Walrus*, the *Globe & Mail*, and *Maclean's*) are meant for a large general audience, are generally affordable, and are easy to purchase or available for free. They are written by staff writers or reporters for the general public.

Additionally, they are:

- About news, opinions, background information, and entertainment.
- More attractive than scholarly journals, with catchy titles, attractive artwork, and many advertisements but no footnotes or references.
- Published by commercial publishers.
- Published after approval from an editor.

**Professional** – Professional magazine articles (such as *CPA Magazine* and *Communication World*) are meant for people in a particular profession and are often accessible through a professional organization. Staff writers or other professionals in the targeted field write these articles at a level and with the language to be understood by everyone in the profession.

Additionally, they are:

- About trends and news from the targeted field, book reviews, and case studies.
- Often less than 10 pages, some of which may contain footnotes and references.
- Usually published by professional associations and commercial publishers.
- Published after approval from an editor.

**Scholarly** – Scholarly journal articles (such as *Journal of Management Information Systems* and *Business Marketing*) are meant for scholars, students, and the general public who want a deep understanding of a problem or issue. Researchers and scholars write these articles to present new knowledge and further understanding of their field of study.

Additionally, they are:

- Where findings of research projects, data and analytics, and case studies usually appear first.
- Often long (usually over 10 pages) and always include footnotes and references.
- Usually published by universities, professional associations, and commercial publishers.
- Published after approval by peer review or from the journal's editor.

## Attributions

This chapter contains information taken from [Categorizing Sources, Qualitative or Quantitative, Fact or Opinion, Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Sources](#), and [Popular, Professional & Scholarly](#) in [Choosing & Using Sources: A Guide to Academic Research](#), which issued under a [CC-BY 4.0 International license](#).

## 2.3 Evaluating sources

### Questions for reflection

- Do you evaluate information you find online or elsewhere before using it in your writing?
- What parts of evaluating sources do you find challenging? What parts are easy?
- What things do you look for to decide whether to use a source?

This section talks about how to identify relevant and credible sources that you have found online and through searches of library databases and catalogs, Google Scholar, and other specialized databases. Relevant, credible sources will meet the information needs of your research project.

Evaluating your sources is critical to the process of research. The CRAAP test allows you analyze your sources and determine if they are appropriate for your research or just plain crap! The CRAAP test uses a series of questions that address specific evaluation criteria like the authority and purpose of the source. This test should be used for all your sources and it is not intended to make you exclude your sources, but to help you to analyze how you intend to use them to support your own arguments.

**C = Currency:** The timeliness of the information.

- When was the information published or posted?
- Has the information been revised or updated?
- Does your topic require current information, or will older sources work as well?

**R = Relevance:** The importance of the information for your needs

- Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Is the information at an appropriate level (i.e. not too elementary or advanced for your needs)?
- Have you looked at a variety of sources before determining this is one you will use?
- Would you be comfortable citing this source in your research paper?

**A = Authority:** The source of the information.

- What are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations?
- Is the author qualified to write on the topic? Do you trust the author?
- Is there contact information, such as a publisher or email address?
- Does the URL reveal anything about the author or source? examples: .ca .com .edu .gov .org .net

**A= Accuracy:** The reliability, truthfulness and correctness of the content.

- Where does the information come from?
- Is the information supported by evidence?
- Has the information been reviewed or refereed?
- Can you verify any of the information in another source or from personal knowledge?
- Does the language or tone seem unbiased and free of emotion?
- Are there spelling, grammar or typographical errors?

**P = Purpose:** The reason the information exists.

- What is the purpose of the information? Is it to inform, teach, sell, entertain or persuade?
- Do the authors/sponsors make their intentions or purpose clear?
- Is the information fact, opinion or propaganda?
- Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?
- Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional or personal biases?

## Attributions

This chapter contains information taken from [Thinking Critically About Sources](#) in [Choosing & Using Sources: A Guide To Academic Research](#) (used under a [CC-BY 4.0 International license](#)) and [Evaluate What You Find With The "CRAAP Test"](#) in [Write Here, Right Now: An Interactive Introduction To Academic Writing And Research](#) (used under a [CC-BY 4.0 International license](#)).

## 2.4 Citing sources

### Questions for reflection

- What kind of sources have you used in the workplace? How has this differed from the kind of sources you've used in school?
- Why do you think the rules that we have around source use exist? Why do we cite sources?
- How does your culture handle using other people's ideas and words? Who "owns" an idea? How do you respectfully use someone's words?
- What questions do you have about citation?
- What's your definition of "academic integrity?"
- Do you think that the rules of "academic integrity" apply to the workplace?
- When you use researched sources, do you typically paraphrase, summarize, or quote other ideas/words?
- What do you think about when deciding whether to quote or paraphrase?
- Are you comfortable writing someone else's idea in your own words?

### Karan's story

When Karan studied in India, he wasn't expected to cite. When he started studying in Canada, he was surprised by the length of the writing assignments. He didn't know how to use sources, so he copied and pasted a few paragraphs into his assignment and hoped he'd done it right. He was worried when his teacher asked to meet with him. She said that he'd plagiarized, and that he could get into a lot of trouble. Luckily, Karan's teacher decided to help him and not report him. She explained that in North American schools, you must distinguish between what words are yours and what come from the source, and what ideas are yours and what come from the source. Karan learned to use quotation marks to show what words came from the source, and to paraphrase by never looking directly at the source.

In this section, we'll tackle how to use sources ethically, analyze them, and combine them into an effective argument.

But first: a note about the difference between workplace citation and academic citation.

In the workplace, you may often find yourself using your colleague's words without crediting them. For example, your boss might ask you to write a grant application using text from previous grant applications. Many people might work on the same document or you might update a document written by someone else.

In the workplace, your employer usually owns the writing you produce, so workplace writing often doesn't cite individual authors (though contributors are usually named in an acknowledgements section if it's a large project/report). That doesn't mean that you should take credit for someone else's work, but in general a lot of sharing and remixing goes on within an organization.

For example, say that you work in HR and have been asked to launch a search for a new IT manager. You might use a template to design the job posting or update copy of the ad you posted the last time you hired someone for this role. No one would expect you to come up with an entirely new job posting just because it was originally written by someone who's left the company.

That said, writers in the workplace often use a wide range of sources to build their credibility. Citation is not only an ethical practice, but it is also a great persuasive strategy. The citation practices you learn in school will therefore serve you well in the workplace.

In school in North America, the context is different. Unless your instructor specifically tells you otherwise, they will assume that you wrote everything in your assignment, unless you use quotation marks.

## What is academic integrity?

Different universities have different definitions. Here is the definition we use at Kwantlen Polytechnic University:

The University ascribes to the highest standards of academic integrity. Adhering to these standards of academic integrity means observing the values on which good academic work must be founded: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with these values. These standards of academic integrity require Students to not engage in or tolerate Integrity Violations, including falsification, misrepresentation or deception, as such acts violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.

You can read the full policy [here](#).

In other words, you must take full responsibility for your work, acknowledge your own efforts, and acknowledge the contributions of others' efforts. Working/ writing with integrity requires accurately representing what you contributed as well as acknowledging how others have influenced your work. When you are a student, an accurate representation of your knowledge is important because it will allow both you and your professors to know the extent to which you have developed as a scholar.

It's worth noting that other cultures have different – equally valid – definitions of academic integrity. By making



you aware of what we mean by academic integrity in this context, you can be aware of the expectations that are being placed on you.

## What is plagiarism?

Let's take a look at a common definition of plagiarism. This one comes from Ohio State University's First Year Experience Office:

At any stage of the writing process, all academic work submitted to the teacher must be a result of a student's own thought, research or self-expression. When a student submits work purporting to be [their] own, but which in any way borrows organization, ideas, wording or anything else from a source without appropriate acknowledgment of the fact, [they are] engaging in plagiarism.

Plagiarism can be intentional (knowingly using someone else's work and presenting it as your own) or unintentional (inaccurately or inadequately citing ideas and words from a source). It may be impossible for your professor to determine whether plagiarized work was intentional or unintentional.

While academic integrity calls for work resulting from your own effort, scholarship requires that you learn from others. In the world of "academic scholarship" you are actually expected to learn new things from others AND come to new insights on your own. There is an implicit understanding that as a student you will be both using other's knowledge as well as your own insights to create new scholarship. To do this in a way that meets academic integrity standards you must acknowledge the part of your work that develops from others' efforts. You do this by citing the work of others. You plagiarize when you fail to acknowledge the work of others and do not follow appropriate citation guidelines.

## What is citing?

Citing is basically giving credit. If your source is well-cited, you've told the audience whose ideas/words belong to whom and you've told the audience exactly where to go to find those words.

## Why cite sources?

There are many good reasons to cite sources.

## To avoid plagiarism & maintain academic integrity

Misrepresenting your academic achievements by not giving credit to others indicates a lack of academic integrity. This is not only looked down upon by the scholarly community, but it is also punished. When you are a student this could mean a failing grade or even expulsion from the university.

## To acknowledge the work of others

One major purpose of citations is to simply provide credit where it is due. When you provide accurate citations, you are acknowledging both the hard work that has gone into producing research and the person(s) who performed that research.

## To provide credibility to your work & to place your work in context

Providing accurate citations puts your work and ideas into an academic context. They tell your reader that you've done your research and know what others have said about your topic. Not only do citations provide context for your work but they also lend credibility and authority to your claims.

For example, if you're researching and writing about sustainability and construction, you should cite experts in sustainability, construction, and sustainable construction in order to demonstrate that you are well-versed in the most common ideas in the fields. Although you can make a claim about sustainable construction after doing research only in that particular field, your claim will carry more weight if you can demonstrate that your claim can be supported by the research of experts in closely related fields as well.

Citing sources about sustainability and construction as well as sustainable construction demonstrates the diversity of views and approaches to the topic. Further, proper citation also demonstrates the ways in which research is social: no one researches in a vacuum—we all rely on the work of others to help us during the research process.

## To help your future researching self & other researchers easily locate sources

Having accurate citations will help you as a researcher and writer keep track of the sources and information you find so that you can easily find the source again. Accurate citations may take some effort to produce, but they will save you time in the long run. Think of proper citation as a gift to your future researching self!

## Other challenges in citing sources

Besides the clarifications and difficulties around citing that we have already considered, there are additional challenges that might make knowing when and how to cite difficult for you.

### *You learned how to write in a different school system*

Citation practices are not universal. Different countries and cultures approach using sources in different ways. If you're new to the Canadian school system, you might have learned a different way of citing. For example, some countries have a more communal approach to sources. Others see school as "not real life," so you don't need to cite sources in the same way that you would on the job.

## *Not really understanding the material you're using*

If you are working in a new field or subject area, you might have difficulty understanding the information from other scholars, thus making it difficult to know how to paraphrase or summarize that work properly. It can be tempting to change just one or two words in a sentence, but this is still plagiarism.

## *Running out of time*

When you are a student taking many classes, working and/or taking care of family members, it may be hard to devote the time needed to doing good scholarship and accurately representing the sources you have used. Research takes time. The sooner you can start and the more time you can devote to it, the better your work will be.

## *Shifting cultural expectations of citation*

Because of new technologies that make finding, using, and sharing information easier, many of our cultural expectations around how to do that are changing as well. For example, blog posts often “reference” other articles or works by simply linking to them. It makes it easy for the reader to see where the author’s ideas have come from and to view the source very quickly. In these more informal writings, blog authors do not have a list of citations (bibliographic entries). The links do the work for them. This is a great strategy for online digital mediums, but this method fails over time when links break and there are no hints (like an author, title and date) to know how else to find the reference, which might have moved.

This example of a cultural change of expectations in the non-academic world might make it seem that there has been a change in academic scholarship as well, or might make people new to academic scholarship even less familiar with citation. But in fact, the expectations around citing sources in academic research remain formal.

## **How to cite sources**

Now that we know why we cite, so let’s learn *how* to cite. Citation and source use are all about balance. If you don’t use enough sources, you might struggle to make a thorough argument. If you cite too much, you won’t leave room for your own voice in your piece.

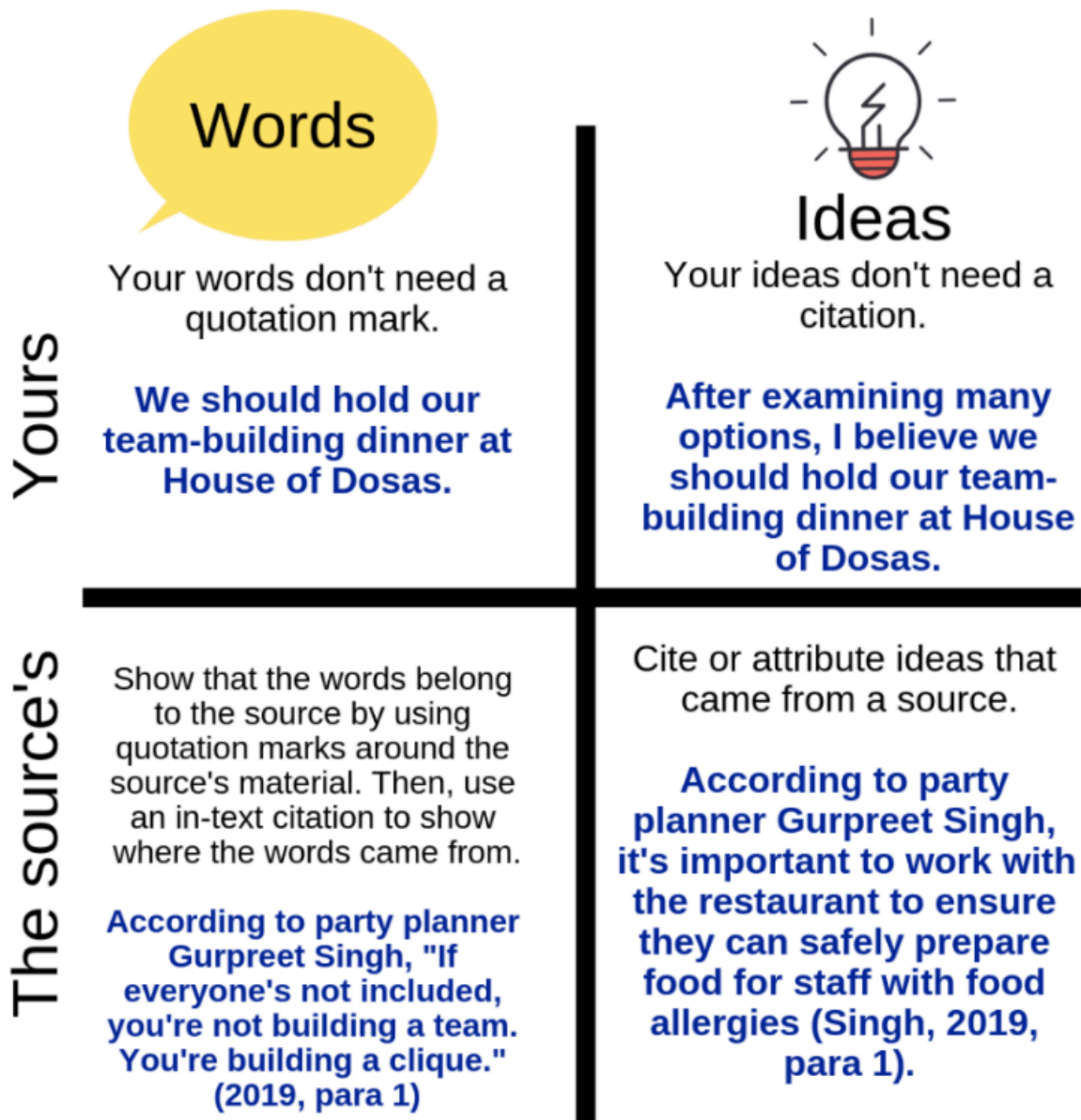
To illustrate this point, think of a lawyer arguing a case in a trial. If the lawyer just talks to the jury and doesn’t call any witnesses, they probably won’t win the case. After all, a lawyer isn’t an expert in forensics or accident reconstruction or Internet fraud. The lawyer also wasn’t there when the incident occurred. That’s where witnesses come in. The witnesses have knowledge that the lawyer doesn’t.

But if the lawyer just lets the witnesses talk and sits there quietly, they’ll likely also lose the case. That’s because the lawyer is the one who’s making the overall argument. The lawyer asks the witnesses questions and shows how the testimony of different witnesses piece together to prove the case.

To cite sources, you should make two things clear:

- The difference between your words and the source’s words.
- The difference between your ideas and the source’s ideas.

This diagram illustrates the difference:



## Attributing a source's words

When you quote someone in your document, you're basically passing the microphone to them. Inviting another voice into your piece means that the **way** that person said something is important. Maybe that person is an expert and their words are a persuasive piece of evidence. Maybe you're using the words as an example. Either way, you'll likely do some sort of analysis on the quote.

When you use the source's words, put quotation marks around them. This creates a visual separation between what you say and what your source says. You also don't just want to drop the quote into the document with no explanation. Instead, you should build a "frame" around the quote by explaining who said it and why it's important. In short, you surround the other person's voice with your own voice.

**Tip:** The longer the source, the more analysis you're likely going to do.

Here's an example of a way to integrate a quote within a paragraph.

**According to Haudenosaunee writer Alicia Elliot (2019, p. 18),** "We know our cultures have meaning and worth, and that culture lives and breathes inside our languages." **Here, Elliot shows that when Indigenous people have the opportunity to learn Indigenous languages, which for generations were intentionally suppressed by the Canadian government, they can connect with their culture in a new way.**

As you can see, Elliot's words are important. If you tried to paraphrase them, you'd lose the meaning. Elliot is also a well-known writer, so adding her voice into the document adds credibility. If you're writing about Indigenous people, it's also important to include the voices of Indigenous people in your work.

You can see that in this example, the author doesn't just pass the microphone to Alicia Elliot. Instead, they surround the quote with their own words, explaining who said the quote and why it's important.

## Attributing the source's ideas

When the source's ideas are important, you'll want to paraphrase. For example, Elliot goes on to say that when over half of Indigenous people in a community speak an Indigenous language, the suicide rate goes down (2019). Here, it's the idea that's important, not the words, so you should **paraphrase** it.

What is paraphrasing? Paraphrasing is when you restate an idea in your own words. It's this last bit — the "own words" part – that is confusing. What counts as your own words?

When you're paraphrasing, you should ask yourself, "Have I restated this in a way that shows that I understand it?" If you simply swap out a few words for synonyms, you haven't shown that you understand the idea. For example, let's go back to that Alicia Elliot quote: "We know our cultures have meaning and worth, and that culture lives and breathes inside our languages." What if I swapped out a few words so it said "We know our cultures have **value** and **importance**, and that culture lives and **exhales** inside our languages."?

Does this show that I understand the quote? No. Elliot composed that line with a lot of precision and thoughtfulness. Switching a few words around actually shows disrespect for the care she took with her language.

Instead, paraphrase by not looking at the source material. Put down the book or turn off your computer monitor, then describe the idea back as if you were speaking to a friend.

## What information do I cite?

Citing sources is often depicted as a straightforward, rule-based practice. In fact, there are many grey areas around citation, and learning how to apply citation guidelines takes practice and education. If you are confused by it, you are not alone – in fact you might be doing some good thinking. Here are some guidelines to help you navigate citation practices.

**Cite when you are directly quoting.** This is the easiest rule to understand. If you are stating word for word what someone else has already written, you must put quotes around those words and you must give credit to the original author. Not doing so would mean that you are letting your reader believe these words are your own and represent your own effort.

**Cite when you are summarizing and paraphrasing.** This is a trickier area to understand. First of all, summarizing and paraphrasing are two related practices but they are not the same. Summarizing is when you read a text, consider the main points, and provide a shorter version of what you learned. Paraphrasing is when you restate what the original author said in your own words and in your own tone. Both summarizing and paraphrasing require good writing skills and an accurate understanding of the material you are trying to

convey. Summarizing and paraphrasing are not easy to do when you are a beginning academic researcher, but these skills become easier to perform over time with practice.

**Cite when you are citing something that is highly debatable.** For example, if you want to claim that an oil pipeline is necessary for economic development, you will have to contend with those who say that it produces few jobs and has a high risk of causing an oil spill that would be devastating to wildlife and tourism. To do so, you'll need experts on your side.

## When don't you cite?

Don't cite when what you are saying is your own insight. Research involves forming opinions and insights around what you learn. You may be citing several sources that have helped you learn, but at some point you are integrating your own opinion, conclusion, or insight into the work. The fact that you are NOT citing it helps the reader understand that this portion of the work is your unique contribution developed through your own research efforts.

Don't cite when you are stating common knowledge. What is common knowledge is sometimes difficult to discern. Generally quick facts like historical dates or events are not cited because they are common knowledge.

Examples of information that would not need to be cited include:

- Partition in India happened on August 15, 1947.
- Vancouver is the 8th biggest city in Canada.

Some quick facts, such as statistics, are trickier. A guideline that can help with determining whether or not to cite facts is to determine whether the same data is repeated in multiple sources. If it is not, it is best to cite.

The other thing that makes this determination difficult might be that what seems new and insightful to you might be common knowledge to an expert in the field. You have to use your best judgment, and probably err on the side of over-citing, as you are learning to do academic research. You can seek the advice of your instructor, a writing tutor, or a librarian. Knowing what is and is not common knowledge is a practiced skill that gets easier with time and with your own increased knowledge.

## Creating in-text citations and references

Now that we know what to cite and how to quote and paraphrase, we need to decide what format to create our in-text citations and references. Your instructor will tell you whether they prefer MLA, APA, Chicago or another style format. Luckily, the Kwantlen Library librarians have come up with handy citation guides, which you can access on the [Citation Styles](#) section of the KPU website.

## When to quote, paraphrase, or summarize

To build everything but the research question, you will need to summarize, paraphrase, and/or directly quote your sources. But how should you choose what technique to use when?

**Choose a direct quote** when it is more likely to be accurate than would summarizing or paraphrasing; when what you're quoting is the text you're analyzing; when a direct quote is more concise than a summary or paraphrase would be and conciseness matters; when the author is a particular authority whose exact words

would lend credence to your argument; and when the author has used particularly effective language that is just too good to pass up.

**Choose to paraphrase or summarize** rather than to quote directly when the meaning is more important than the particular language the author used and you don't need to use the author's preeminent authority to bolster your argument at the moment.

**Choose to paraphrase instead of summarizing** when you need details and specificity. Paraphrasing lets you emphasize the ideas in resource materials that are most related to your term paper or essay instead of the exact language the author used. It also lets you simplify complex material, sometimes rewording to use language that is more understandable to your reader.

**Choose to summarize instead of paraphrasing** when you need to provide a brief overview of a larger text. Summaries let you condense the resource material to draw out particular points, omit unrelated or unimportant points, and simplify how the author conveyed his or her message.

## Attributions

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## 2.5 Making an argument

### Questions for reflection

- Have you ever argued with someone online? If so, how did you present your argument? Was your argument successful?
- How do people create arguments in your area of study or career path? Are there certain ethical rules that people in your industry must follow?
- How do people argue in your culture? Do you argue with everyone the same way (an elder vs. someone your age)?
- Do you think it's possible to change someone's mind using logic?
- Do you find it easier to create an argument in writing or in person? Why?

### Making an argument

Making an argument means trying to convince others that you are correct as you describe a thing, situation, or phenomenon and/or persuade them to take a particular action. Important not just in university, that skill will be necessary for nearly every professional job you hold.

Realizing that your research report, essay, blog post, or oral presentation is to make an argument gives you a big head start because right off you know the sources you're going to need are those that will let you write the components of an argument for your reader.

It's no accident that people are said to make arguments. They are constructed from components that act like building blocks. The components are selected because of what they contribute to the argument. The components generally, though not always, appear in a certain order because they build on or respond to one another.

### Components of an argument

Making an argument in a report, term paper, or other college writing task is like laying out a case in court. Just as there are conventions that lawyers must adhere to as they make their arguments in court, there are conventions in arguments made in university assignments. Among those conventions is to use the components of an argument.

One common arrangement for an argument is to begin with an introduction that explains why the situation is important—why the reader should care about it. Your research question will probably not appear here, but your answer to it (your thesis or claim) usually appears as the last sentence or two of the introduction.

The body of your essay or paper follows and consists of:



- Your reasons the thesis or claim is correct or at least reasonable.
- The evidence that supports each reason, often occurring right after the reason the evidence supports.
- An acknowledgement that some people have/could have objections, reservations, counterarguments, or alternative solutions to your argument and a statement of each. (Posters often don't have room for this component.)
- A response to each acknowledgement that explains why that criticism is incorrect or not very important. Sometimes you might have to concede a point you think is unimportant, if you can't really refute it.
- After the body, the paper or essay ends with a conclusion, which states your thesis in a slightly different way than occurred in the introduction. The conclusion also may mention why research on this situation is important. Sometimes recommendations also follow based on the argument made and conclusions stated.

For example, the thesis or claim is derived from the initial question. The reasons are bolstered by evidence to support the claim. Objections are raised, acknowledged and subsequently responded to.

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## 2.6 Annotated bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a descriptive and evaluative list of citations for books, articles, or other documents. Each citation is followed by a brief paragraph – the annotation – alerting the reader to the accuracy, quality, and relevance of that source.

Composing an annotated bibliography helps you to gather your thoughts on how to use the information contained in the cited sources, and it helps the reader to decide whether to pursue the full context of the information you provide.

Depending on the purpose of your bibliography, different elements will be more important and some may not be important at all. Your instructor may also have guidelines or be able to talk about priorities.

While an annotation can be as short as one sentence, the average entry in an annotated bibliography consists of a work's citation information followed by a short paragraph. The annotated bibliography may potentially include:

- **Author information**  
Who is the author? What is her/his background? Is the author qualified to write this document?
- **Author's purpose**  
What is the author's purpose in writing this article or doing this research? Is the purpose stated or implied? Does the author have a particular message?
- **Audience information**  
To what audience is the author writing (scholars, teachers, the general public, etc.)? Is this reflected in the author's style of writing or presentation?
- **Author bias**  
Does the author show any biases or make assumptions upon which the rationale of the article rests? If so, what are they?
- **Information source**  
What methods did the author use to obtain the data? Is the article based on personal opinion, experience, interviews, library research, questionnaires, laboratory experiments, empirical observation, or standardized personality tests?
- **Author conclusion**  
What conclusions does the author draw? Are these conclusions specifically stated or implied?
- **Conclusion justification**  
Are the conclusions justified from the research or experience? Are the conclusions in sync with the original purpose of the research and supported by the data? Are the conclusions skewed by bias?
- **Relationship to other works**  
How does this work compare with others cited? Does it conflict with conventional wisdom, established scholarship, government policy, etc.? Are there specific studies or writings cited with which this one agrees or disagrees? Are there any opinions not cited of which readers should be aware? Is the evidence balanced or weighted in favor of a particular perspective?
- **Time frame**  
Is the work current? Is this important? How does the time in which it was written reflect on the information contained in this work?
- **Significant attachments**  
Are there significant attachments such as appendices, bibliographies, illustrations, etc.? Are they valuable or not? If there are none, should there be?

Your instructor may have specific requirements for what your annotated bibliography should address.

### Sample annotated bibliography entry using APA style (Trent University, 2019)

Morey, D. F. (2006). Burying key evidence: The social bond between dogs and people. *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 33, 158-175. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2005.07.009>

In this article, Morey documents the widespread human practice of burying domesticated dogs and questions what this practice can reveal about relationships between the two **[This sentence demonstrates the topic of the article]**. He argues that dog burials have been more frequent and more consistent than burials of other types of animals, suggesting that humans have invested dogs with spiritual and personal identities. Morey also demonstrates that the study of dog burials can help scholars to more accurately date the domestication of dogs; thus, he challenges scholars who rely solely on genetic data in their dating of domestication to consider more fully the importance of archaeological finds **[The previous 2 sentences explain the article's argument]**. To support his arguments, Morey provides detailed data on the frequency, geographic and historical distribution, as well as modes of dog burials and compares the conclusions he draws from this data to those found by scholarship based on genetic data **[This sentence gives an overview of the method used in the article]**. This article is useful to a literature review on the domestication of dogs because it persuasively shows the importance of using burial data in dating dog domestication and explains how use of this data could change assessments of when domestication occurred **[This sentence explains the relevance of the article to the assigned topic]**.

## Reference

Trent University. (2019). *How to create an annotated bibliography*. Retrieved from <https://www.trentu.ca/academicskills/how-guides/how-write-university/how-approach-any-assignment/how-create-annotated-bibliography>.

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