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## **Research**

### **Learning Outcomes:**

- Identify and write a research-driven analysis of a viable local issue;
- Consider multiple stakeholders and their perspectives on an issue;
- Locate relevant sources using online search tools and databases (including news sources);
- Evaluate credibility and recognize biases of sources;
- Examine a range of diverse positions centering on a single issue and synthesize the ideas so they are in conversation with one another;
- Extend understanding of rhetorical analysis to academic research.

### **Introduction:**

For this assignment, you will look to your home community and determine a pressing social issue, one that you have either dealt with personally or one that affects the larger community. You should identify the stakeholders (the people who are affected by or care about the issue) and their perspectives to understand the complexity of the selected social issue or injustice.

### **Purpose:**

The goal of this assignment is to help you better understand how issues of social justice arise and impact the local community. In doing so, you will explore and analyze these events not to lay blame, come up with a solution, or pick a side. Rather, you are to articulate what the social issue is, how it affects your community, what contributes to the issue, what social, cultural, and/or economic factors serve to maintain the injustice, and what is being done to combat the issue.

### **Genre:**

The research genre is source-based, which often means that the effectiveness and success of a research paper is tied to the quality of the sources that the writer uses. Writers build their arguments (and change them) in response to a source's meaning. Therefore, research papers don't simply go through sources in piecemeal fashion (like a list or with quotes dropped into the writing); rather, they put sources into conversation by thinking through what they have in common, where they differ, and, of course, why they are included. You should construct your argument in stages or subtopics and use source material as a way to move your reader towards a better understanding of differing perspectives on the problem and possible responses to it.

### **Writing Center:**

While you can use the Writing Center during any point of the brainstorming and writing process, in past semesters, writers working on this assignment have found it useful to have sessions about:

- Identifying an issue that will allow you to address the assignment's requirements
- Brainstorming possible stakeholders
- Finding sources and then developing strategies for how to read those sources
- Putting the sources you find into conversation

### **Requirements:**

- Clearly define a social justice issue related to your community;
- Create a controlling idea or thesis;
- Develop a clear organizational pattern/structure;

- Integrate sources into analysis;
- Present the issue in its totality by both exploring its complexity and considering the positions of multiple stakeholders in the social discussion;
- MLA format (double-spaced, 12-point font, 1” margins, and Times New Roman font);
- 1250-1500 words (5-6 pages).

**Audience:** Classmates, Professor, Writing Center, You. As we advance in our writing projects, our conceptions of audience will become more dynamic and complex.

**Due Dates:**

## Unit 3: 110 RESEARCH RUBRIC

The following rubric reflects the assignment priorities. Please refer to the assignment for specific guidelines. A check mark in a given box indicates how well the document addresses the criteria listed in each category.

	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	EMERGING	ATTEMPTED	DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS
<b>CONTROLLING IDEA/ PURPOSE AUDIENCE:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explicitly articulates a complex thesis that articulates a clear position to be developed in the paper;</li><li>• Meaningfully contributes to the conversation about a social issue and connects to a framework;</li><li>• May identify why perspectives differ, the root causes, or why the social issue is difficult to resolve;</li><li>• Draws complex, meaningful connections that take out-of-the-box risks, in synthesizing, and interpreting research.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Competently articulates a somewhat complex thesis that articulates a position to be developed in the paper;</li><li>• Contributes to the conversation about a social issue and may connect to a framework;</li><li>• Offers some insight into differing perspectives, root causes, or why the social issue is difficult to resolve;</li><li>• Draws connections in synthesizing, and interpreting research.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Articulates a thesis, though it may be lacking in complexity, a clear position or a blueprint for the paper to follow;</li><li>• Does not connect to a framework for deeper understanding of the social issue or contribute to an ongoing discourse;</li><li>• Is limited in its consideration of differing perspectives, root causes, resolvability, and</li><li>• Limited in drawing connections in the synthesis and interpretation of research.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limited thesis does not take a clear position and does not offer a blueprint for the paper to follow;</li><li>• Does not connect to a framework for deeper understanding of the social issue or contribute to an ongoing discourse; does not consider varied perspectives or causes;</li><li>• Does not draw connections between ideas, lacks a cohesion in the synthesis and interpretation of research, or is missing these components.</li></ul>	Did not meet the requirements of the thesis section.

<b>DEVELOPMENT and SUPPORT:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies and thoroughly investigates a topical local issue for research;</li> <li>Effectively explains and analyzes the effects of the social issue and its stakeholders;</li> <li>Connects to a larger conversation which the development of ideas supports, enhances, and extends;</li> <li>Produces original insights and "new knowledge";</li> <li>Contains a conclusionary vision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies and discusses a topical local issue;</li> <li>Sufficiently explains and analyzes the effects of the social issue and its stakeholders;</li> <li>Makes connections to a larger conversation which may not further the development of ideas;</li> <li>Produces insights into the issue, though they may not be original;</li> <li>Conclusion encapsulates argument.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies local issue for research which may not be topical;</li> <li>Looks into the effects of the social issue though connections to a larger conversation may be limited in enhancement and extension of thesis;</li> <li>Insights into the issue are superficial or disconnected;</li> <li>Conclusion is incohesive or redundant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not clearly identify local issue for research or is vague or general in its topic;</li> <li>Does not consider the effects of the social issue or connect it to a larger conversation;</li> <li>Insights into the issue are superficial, disconnected, or missing;</li> <li>Conclusion does not culminate ideas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did not meet the requirements of the development section.</li> </ul>
<b>Research and Use of Sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locates varied and relevant sources; Conducts in-depth field research as appropriate;</li> <li>Evaluates credibility and recognizes biases of sources;</li> <li>Synthesizes ideas so they are in conversation with one another;</li> <li>Seamlessly integrates source material using summary, paraphrase, and quotations with MLA format and a Works Cited page.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locates relevant sources; Conducts competent field research;</li> <li>May be limited in its evaluation of credibility and recognition of biases of sources;</li> <li>Synthesis <u>may be not</u> be smooth or cohesive, though ideas are in conversation;</li> <li>Sufficiently integrates source material.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sources and field research may be limited in their variety, relevance, or connections;</li> <li>Incorrect or missing evaluation of credibility and recognition of biases of sources;</li> <li>Ideas are not synthesized or in conversation with one another;</li> <li>Source material is not integrated properly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sources and field research have severe limitations in their variety, relevance, or connections;</li> <li>Incorrect or missing evaluation of credibility and recognition of biases of sources causes misunderstandings or misinformation;</li> <li>Ideas are not presented clearly;</li> <li>Source material is not properly cited.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did not meet the requirements of the research section.</li> </ul>
<b>Organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issue is explored in a systematic way with sections describing various effects, analyzing causes, articulating possible solutions and the implementation of them;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issue is explored though sections may not have clear objectives (such as various effects, analyzing causes, articulating possible solutions);</li> <li>Paper progresses but</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issue is discussed though sections do not offer a clear path for exploration of the ideas;</li> <li>Paper's progression is impeded by unclear organizations;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issue is superficially discussed;</li> <li>Paper lacks clear or discernible organization;</li> <li>Paragraphs are missing several crucial elements and do not logically connect to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did not meet the requirements of the organization section.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paper progresses using intuitive or logical organization and clarity;</li> <li>Paragraphs use strong topic sentences that develop the thesis statement, provide specific evidence, examples, or details to support the topic sentence and include an analysis of why evidence is significant;</li> <li>Transitions within <u>writer's framework</u> use various source materials to guide readers through discussion.</li> </ul>	<p><u>organization</u> may not be complex or intuitive;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paragraphs topic sentences that develop the thesis statement, but one of a number of paragraph components (such as specific evidence, examples, details or analysis) may be underdeveloped or disconnected;</li> <li>Transitions within <u>writer's framework</u> use various source materials but guidance for readers through discussion may be unclear.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paragraphs may be missing crucial elements: topic sentences, specific evidence, examples, details or analysis;</li> <li>Paragraph structure is underdeveloped or disconnected;</li> <li>Writer's framework does not effectively use various source materials to guide readers through discussion.</li> </ul>	<p>thesis;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paragraph structure is incohesive;</li> <li>Underuse of source materials and a clear communication of how they tether to discussion.</li> </ul>	
<b>Presentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meets all formatting requirements;</li> <li>Thorough proofreading; minimal sentence-level errors that do not impede meaning;</li> <li>Exhibits an eloquence in writing style that may include parallel structures, strategic repetition, sophisticated use of language, and diverse sentence structures;</li> <li>Uses clear and concise language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meets most formatting requirements; minimal citation and formatting errors do not impede communication of information;</li> <li>Close proofreading; sentence-level errors only minimally impede meaning</li> <li>Exhibits a competent and controlled writing style that demonstrates an awareness of language;</li> <li>Effectively communicates though language may be verbose or redundant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formatting errors are egregious or frequent enough to minimally impede communication of information;</li> <li>Proofreading of sentence-level errors impedes complete and clear communication of meaning;</li> <li>Exhibits issues in the awareness and control of language;</li> <li>Language may be too simple or unclear to communicate complex ideas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formatting errors impede communication of information;</li> <li>Sentence language and structures do not serve to communicate ideas effectively;</li> <li>Demonstrates fundamental issues in the use of language which severely impede the communication of even simple ideas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did not meet the requirements of the presentation section.</li> </ul>

### **Learning Outcomes:**

- Identify and write a research-driven analysis of a viable local issue;
- Consider multiple stakeholders and their perspectives on an issue;
- Locate relevant sources using online search tools and databases (including news sources);
- Evaluate credibility and recognize biases of sources;
- Examine a range of diverse positions centering on a single issue and synthesize the ideas so they are in conversation with one another;
- Extend understanding of rhetorical analysis to academic research.





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## Research: Where do I begin?

Before you begin your research, you should ask yourself some questions. These will help narrow your search parameters.



## Cite your source automatically in MLA or APA format

Website



Search by URL, title, or keyword

Cite

Using citation machines responsibly ([https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/using\\_citation\\_machines\\_responsibly.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/using_citation_machines_responsibly.html))

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## What kind of information are you looking for?

Do you want facts? Opinions? News reports? Research studies? Analyses? Personal reflections? History?

## Where would be a likely place to look?

Which sources are likely to be most useful to you? Libraries? The Internet? Academic periodicals? Newspapers? Government records?

If, for example, you are searching for information on some current event, a reliable newspaper like the *New York Times* will be a useful source. Are you searching for statistics on some aspect of the U.S. population? Then, start with documents such as United States census reports. Do you want some scholarly interpretations of literature? If so, academic periodicals and books are likely to have what you're looking for. Want to know about commercial products? Will those companies have Web sites with information? Are you searching for local history? Then a county library, government office, or local newspaper archive is likely to be the most useful.

## How much information do you need?

How many sources of information are you looking for? Do you need to view both sides of the issue?



# Welcome to the Purdue OWL

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/conducting\\_research/research\\_overview/sources.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/conducting_research/research_overview/sources.html)

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## Types of Sources

The amount of information available to us can be overwhelming and confusing. This section provides a list of common types of sources and what information you can discover from each.

# Cite your source automatically in MLA or APA format

Using citation machines responsibly ([https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/using\\_citation\\_machines\\_responsibly.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/using_citation_machines_responsibly.html))

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## Traditional print sources

**Books and Textbooks:** Books present a multitude of topics. Because of the time it takes to publish a book, books usually contain more dated information than will be found in journals and newspapers.

**Newspapers:** Newspapers contain very up-to-date information by covering the latest events and trends. Newspapers report both information that is factual in nature and also share opinions. Generally, however, they will not take a “big picture” approach or contain information about larger trends.

**Academic and Trade Journals:** Academic and trade journals contain the most up-to-date information and research in industry, business, and academia. Journal articles come in several forms, including literature reviews that overview current and past research, articles on theories and history, or articles on specific processes or research.

**Government Reports and Legal Documents:** The government releases information intended for its own use or for public use. These types of documents can be an excellent source of information. An example of a government report is the U.S. Census data. Most government reports and legal documents can now be accessed online.

**Press Releases and Advertising:** Companies and special interest groups produce texts to help persuade readers to act in some way or inform the public about some new development.

**Flyers, Pamphlets, Leaflets:** While some flyers or pamphlets are created by reputable sources, because of the ease in which they are created, many less-than-reputable sources also produce these. They are useful for quick reference or very general information.

**Multimedia:** Printed material is certainly not the only option for finding research. Also consider media sources such as radio and television broadcasts, interactive talks, and public meetings. Though we often go online for this information, libraries and archives often have a wealth of nondigitized media or media that is not available online.

## Digital sources

**Websites:** Most of the information on the Internet is distributed via websites. Websites vary widely in quality of information and validity of sources.

**Blogs and personal websites:** Blogs and personal sites vary widely in quality of information and validity of sources. For example, many prestigious journalists and public figures may have blogs, which may be more credible of a blog than most.

**Social media, message boards, discussion lists, and chat rooms:** These types of sources exist for all kinds of disciplines, both in and outside of the university. Some may be useful, depending on the topic you are studying, but just like personal websites, the information is not always credible.

**Multimedia:** The Internet has a multitude of multimedia resources including online broadcasts and news, images, audio files, podcasts and interactive websites.



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Open Text for students and faculty in college-level courses  
that require writing and research.

# Web Search Strategies: Basics and Beyond

Written by Christine Photinos

Category: [Library and Internet Research \(/chapters/information-literacy/library-and-internet-research/\)](/chapters/information-literacy/library-and-internet-research/)

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## Introduction

Web searching can appear deceptively simple. Type just about anything into the search box and the search engine will return results—probably thousands of them. This leads to both frustration and complacency: many users understand themselves to be proficient searchers at the same time that they struggle with large quantities of irrelevant results.

Search engines make available a great variety of tools that can improve search precision. Filtering out all irrelevant results is not, in most cases, an attainable or appropriate goal. A more productive goal—and the focus of the strategies described below—is to increase the concentration of relevant results and promote relevant results closer to the top of the result list.

## Search With Phrases

You can narrow your web searches by enclosing phrases in quotation marks.

When you enclose search terms in quotation marks (""), you are telling the search engine that you want results that include only these exact terms in this exact order.

For example: Try doing a search for students on Mars, without quotation marks, and note the number and type of results you receive. Now run the search again, this time enclosing the phrase in quotation marks: "students on Mars." The number of results drops dramatically and all of the results include the exact phrase "students on Mars."



\* **note:** Capitalization is ignored in all major search engines.  
Searching for Mars is the same as searching for mars.

## Add Terms to Narrow Your Search

Every time you add a term to your search, you are narrowing that search. So when you need to limit a web search, try adding more terms.

A good approach when adding terms is to identify each of the main concepts in the topic you are researching and then generate a list of terms associated with those concepts.

For example, suppose you are researching the following question:

Should internet access at public libraries be filtered?

The question has three major components, each of which might suggest possible search terms:

internet	libraries	filtering
computers	public library	censor
web		restrict

You'll discover additional relevant terms once you begin searching, so it's fine to begin with a small set of search terms.

Note, too, that search engines will often return related results. For example, if you begin your search with the terms web, library, and censor, Google will add the terms internet, libraries, and censorship to your search.

## Filter Out Unwanted Terms

If your search produces many unwanted results, try to identify a term common to these unwanted results, and add it to your search with a minus sign (-) in front of it. For example, if you wanted to find a recipe for a salsa without tomatoes, you might use the following search: salsa recipe -tomato -tomatoes.

This search will exclude from your results any page containing the term "tomato" or "tomatoes."

## Open Pages in New Tabs

When you want to check out a promising result without losing track of your original set of search results, hold down your Control key (Command key on a Mac) and then click on the link. This will open the page in a new tab.

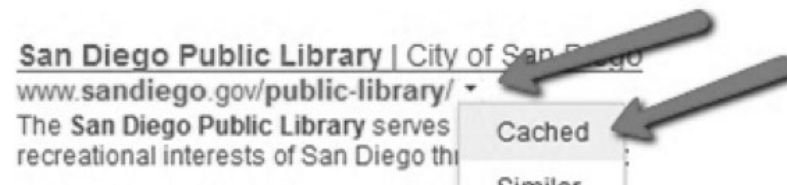
## View Cached Pages

Remember that search engines do not search in real time: they do not zip around the globe searching for answers to every search query. Instead, they search an index that has been compiled over time in order to determine which "live"

web page to direct you to. The index includes the terms that appeared on the page in the past, when the page was last visited by the search engine.

Some sites are indexed more frequently than others. This is why our search results are sometimes disappointing: the information we seek was on the page days, weeks, or months ago when the page was indexed, but the information is no longer appearing on the live page. The search-engine index is out of date.

If a page is returned to you without your search terms, try navigating to the “cached” version of the page, as the information you are seeking may appear on this older/saved version of the page:



## Quickly Find Your Search Terms on a Page

The fastest way to review a set of search results is to scan the URLs and the “snippets”—the short excerpts located beneath search results, in which your search terms appear boldfaced. Be aware that snippets can sometimes be misleading or confusing.



Cute **puppies** snuggle at assisted living facility, hope to join list of ...  
WCVB Boston - May 15, 2017  
Volunteers with Great Dog Rescue New England brought nearly a dozen **puppies** to ...  
"These drinks can be very **dangerous**," Watts said.



After you click into a result, you can open a search box in your browser and use it to go directly to specific terms on the page. To bring up a search box, hold down the Ctrl key and tap the F key (Cmd-F on a Mac).

**Control + F**

**Command + F (Mac)**

An example:

If you do a web search with the terms **higher education information literacy synthesize**, one of the top-ranking results will be a page on the American Library Association (ALA) website containing the "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education" that was adopted by the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) in 2016. The title of the webpage contains four of your search terms:  
**information literacy higher education**

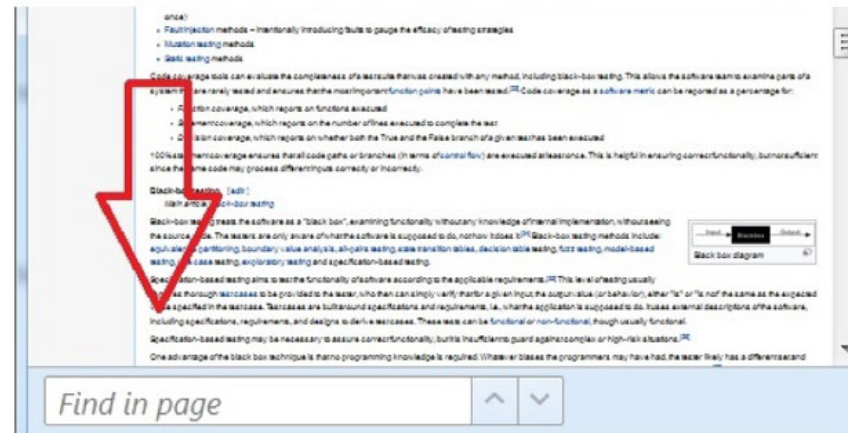
Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education

But what about your fifth search term, **synthesize**?

Rather than scrolling up and down through this document of more than 4000 words hunting for the word "synthesize" (which appears only once), use **Ctrl-F** (or **Cmd-F** on a Mac) to open a search field and enter the term "synthesize."

If you are not seeing the search field, check the top and bottom left and right corners of your screen. At the time of this writing, Chrome places it in the top right and Explorer places it in the top left.

In Firefox it appears in the bottom left:



Equivalent tools are available on phones:

iPhone: <https://nu.adobeconnect.com/iphone/>  
(<https://nu.adobeconnect.com/iphone/>)

Android: <https://www.quora.com/How-do-I-do-control-t-f-in-Android-devices> (<https://www.quora.com/How-do-I-do-control-t-f-in-Android-devices>)

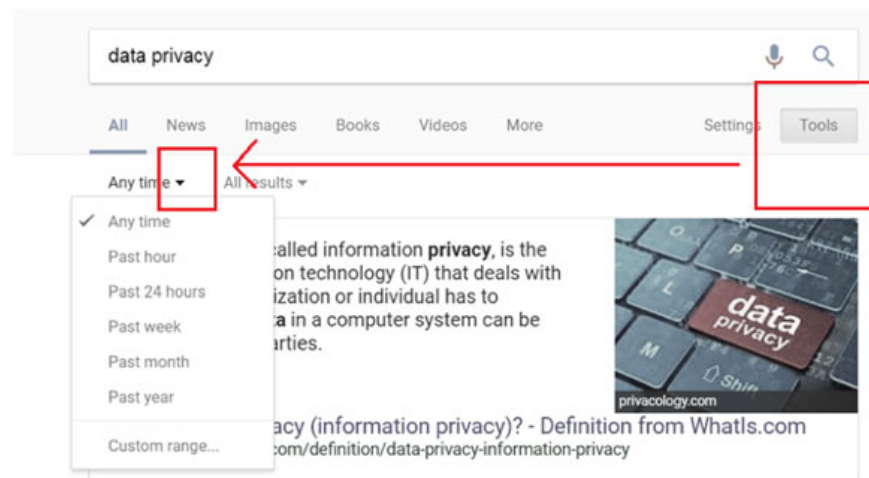
If you search and do not find the word or words that brought you to the page, the most likely explanation is that the page has changed since the search engine last indexed it. See **VIEW CACHED PAGES** (above) and **RETRIEVE PAST DIGITAL CONTENT USING THE INTERNET ARCHIVE** (below) for tips on locating old web content.

Google research scientist Daniel Russell has found that using Ctrl-F improves search efficiency by 12% (<https://www.elon.edu/e-net/Article/89564>).

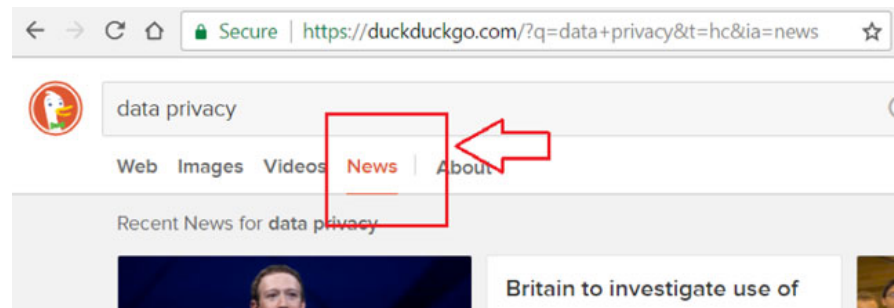
## Find Recent Information on a Topic

If you want very recent information on a topic, try limiting your search by date, or try searching specifically for News.

For example, suppose you want only recent results on the topic of data privacy. You can restrict the timeframe of your search:



Or you can filter your search to display "News" results only:



Regular search results for **data privacy** will emphasize general information and definitions, while a News search for this term will return reports of recent happenings around the issue of data privacy, such as information about recent legislation and court rulings.

Time filters and news filters are located in different places in different search engines but are usually easy to find. The important thing is to know to look for them.

## Filter by Domain Name

Distinctions among top-level domain names such as .org and .com have broken down in recent years, but some domain names have retained their original meanings and are helpful to know:

domain	description	example
.edu	university site	<a href="https://www.nu.edu">https://www.nu.edu</a>
.gov	government site	<a href="https://www.senate.gov">https://www.senate.gov</a>
.mil	military site	<a href="https://www.army.mil">https://www.army.mil</a>



(The top-level domain .org was originally intended for use by non-profit organizations—and many non-profits continue to use it—but it is now open to anyone.)

You can limit/filter your searches by domain with site:

site:edu | site:gov | site:mil (note: there is no space after the colon)

Example: If you search for **essay help**, your results will be dominated by sites that sell essays to students (popularly known as “paper mills” or “cheat sites”). A search for **essay help site:edu** will primarily return college websites offering writing assistance.

The **site:** limiter also works with specific websites.

Privacy site:nytimes.com  
(This search will return New York Times articles containing the term “privacy”)

Writing Center site:nu.edu  
(The first result for this search will likely be the web page for the NU Writing Center.)

## Predict - and Filter For - a Specific Type of Result

When choosing your search terms, think about the types of terms that are likely to appear on pages of the kind you are seeking. Consider, for example, the difference between the

search terms **stuffy nose** and **rhinitis**. The meaning of the terms may be roughly the same, but “rhinitis” is far more likely to return specialized results.

The kind of sources you are seeking should factor into your selection of search terms.

This basic search concept—anticipating what your desired content will look like and crafting the search accordingly—can be extended: You can search with greater precision by making predictions about the package in which your desired content is likely to be contained.

For example, if you are seeking data, the kinds of search results you want are likely to be saved in xls (Microsoft Excel spreadsheet file format) or csv (comma separated values file format). You can search for specific file types using the filetype: operator.

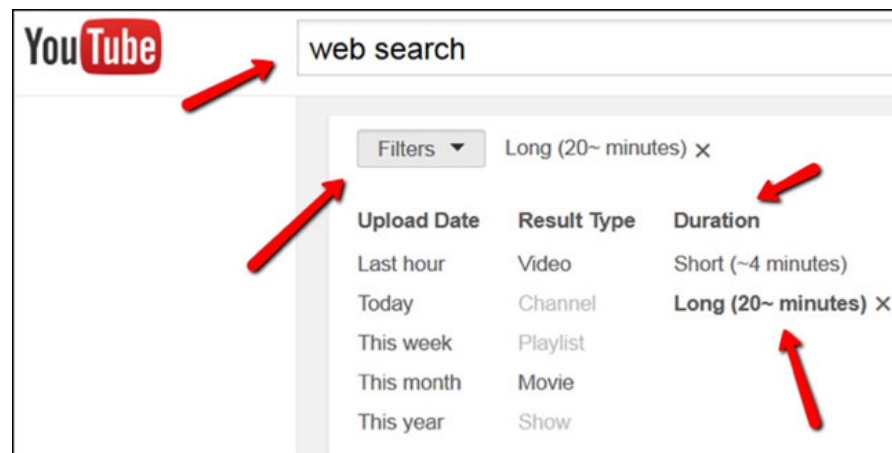
Example:

texting driving filetype:xls

Remember that operators can also be used to *exclude* certain types of search results. For example, imagine that a particular search is returning too many results in the form of slide presentations. These results do not represent the amount of detail or depth you are seeking, and clicking through slides is more cumbersome than scrolling through a web page. In such a circumstance, you might add the following to your search to *remove* powerpoint results:

-filetype:ppt -filetype:pptx

Along the same lines, you might reflect on whether your desired content is likely to appear in a short format or a longer format. For example, if you are searching YouTube for a substantial lecture on a topic, there is a good chance the type of video file you are seeking will run longer than 20 minutes. To filter for longer content, you can click on Filters and from the *Duration* options select *Long (20~ minutes)*:



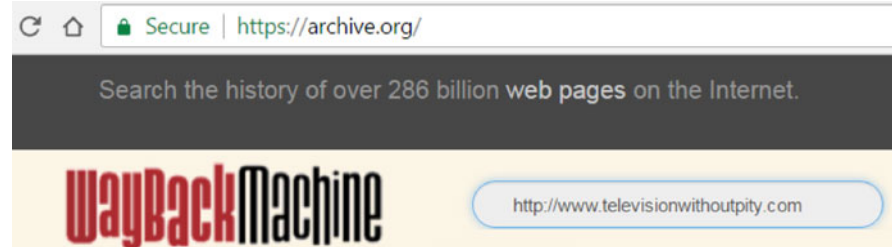
## Retrieve Past Digital Content Using the Internet Archive

We often talk about digital content as permanent. Consider, for example, this recent headline: "Thanks To Facebook Your Horrible Memories Will Never Go Away."

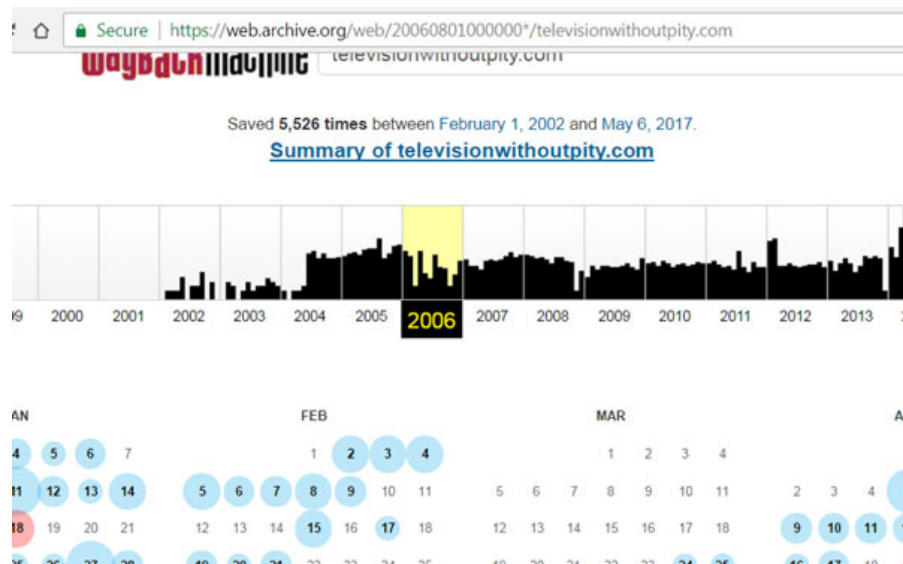
But as users we know that that the digital realm is in a constant state of flux. Things sometimes do disappear. The Internet Archive, a non-profit organization founded in 1996, seeks to preserve past web content.

When you are searching for older content that is no longer available on the original site and too old to be part of a search engine's cache, you can try searching with the Internet Archive's "Wayback Machine."

For example, suppose you want to see what the website Television Without Pity looked like before 2007 when it was purchased by NBC. Go to the Internet Archive (<https://www.archive.org>) and enter the URL <https://www.televisionwithoutpity.com> into the search box of the "Wayback Machine":



The Wayback Machine provides an overview of years and dates included in the archive for [televisionwithoutpity.com](http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com):

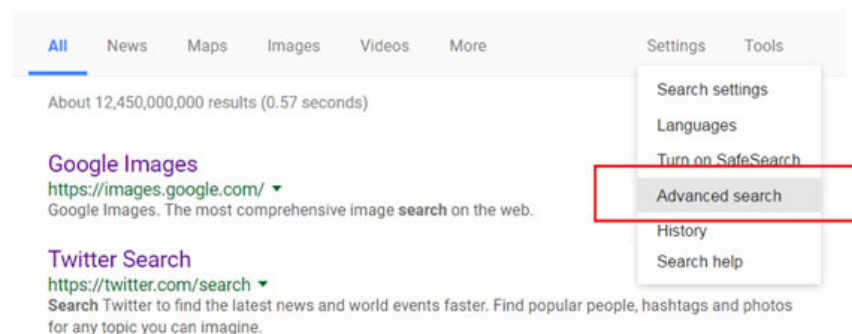


Clicking on a specific date will take you to a view of the Television Without Pity site on that day.

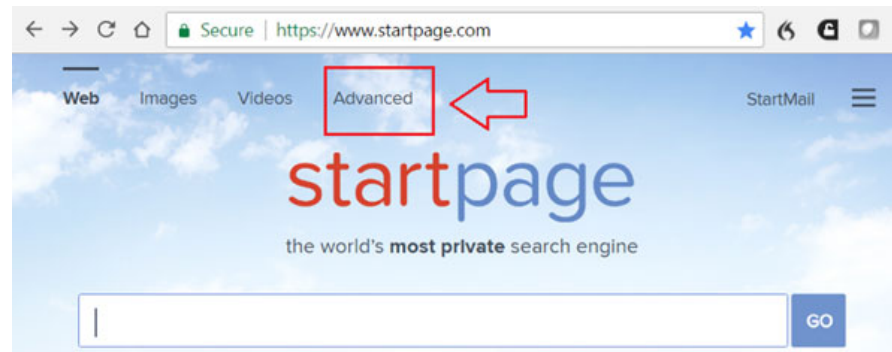
## Explore More Search Tools

Most search engines offer advanced search options.

You will find Google's "Advanced Search" page at [https://www.google.com/advanced\\_search](https://www.google.com/advanced_search) ([https://www.google.com/advanced\\_search](https://www.google.com/advanced_search)) or under "Settings":



StartPage provides an Advanced search link on its home page:



Search engines routinely change the location of Advanced search. The important thing is to know that advanced search tools exist and to sniff around for them when the search engine interface makes them hard to find.

## Distinguish Between Non-Paid Search Results and Advertisements

Search engines such as Google and Bing make money by selling targeted ads. Effective web searchers are alert to the presence of ads and know how to distinguish them from non-paid search results.

Federal regulations in the United States require that advertisements be distinguished "clearly and prominently" from non-paid search results (<https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2013/06/ftc-consumer-protection-staff-updates-agencys-guidance-search>). Search engine companies have interpreted this direction in different ways, with the result that paid search results are displayed differently in

different search environments. An additional challenge for users is the frequency with which search engine companies change the visual presentation of advertisements.

When viewing a set of search results, be alert to the presence of targeted ads, which will be indicated with terms such as Ad, Sponsored, or Promoted.

Consider the set of search results below. How quickly are you able to identify the paid search result?

[The Five-Paragraph Essay - CommNet](#)

[grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/five\\_par.htm](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/five_par.htm) ▼

A classic format for compositions is the five-paragraph essay. It is not the only format for writing an essay, of course, but it is a useful model for you to keep in ...

[Essay - definition of essay by The Free Dictionary](#)

[www.thefreedictionary.com/essay](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/essay) ▼

es-say (ēs'ā, ē-sā) n. 1. (ēs'ā) a. A short literary composition on a single subject, usually presenting the personal view of the author. b ...

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The paid search result (the last one in the list, in which the word “Ad” appears) is not the only commercial result, but it is the result that the search engine is returning as part of a paid advertising agreement.

We may debate the extent to which we can or ought to tune out advertising, but few would question the value of being able to recognize advertising and distinguish it from other types of content.



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<https://writingcommons.org/open-text/information-literacy/library-and-internet-research/web-search-strategies/810-web-search-strategies>



# Googlepedia: Turning Information Behaviors into Research Skills

by Randall McClure

This essay is a chapter in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, Volume 2, a peer-reviewed open textbook series for the writing classroom.

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# Googlepedia: Turning Information Behaviors into Research Skills

*Randall McClure*

## INTRODUCTION

The ways in which most writers find, evaluate, and use information have changed significantly over the past ten years.\* A recent study, for example, has shown that as many as nine out of every ten students begin the process of searching for information on the Web, either using a search engine, particularly Google, or an online encyclopedia, notably Wikipedia (Nicholas, Rowlands and Huntington 7). I believe this finding is true of most writers, not just students like you; the Web is our research home.

To illustrate for you how the Web has changed the nature of research and, as a result, the shape of research-based writing, I trace in this chapter the early research decisions of two first year composition students, Susan and Edward, one who begins research in Google and another who starts in Wikipedia. Part narrative, part analysis, part reflection, and part instruction, this chapter blends the voices of the student researchers with me, in the process of seeking a new way to research.

Please understand that I do not plan to dismiss the use of what I call “Googlepedia” in seeking information. As James P. Purdy writes

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in his essay on Wikipedia in Volume 1 of *Writing Spaces*, “[Y]ou are going to use [Google and] Wikipedia as a source for writing assignments regardless of cautions against [them], so it is more helpful to address ways to use [them] than to ignore [them]” (205). Therefore, my goal in this chapter is to suggest a blended research process that begins with the initial tendency to use Google and Wikipedia and ends in the university library. While Susan and Edward find Googlepedia to be “good enough” for conducting research, this chapter shows you why that’s not true and why the resources provided by your school library are still much more effective for conducting research. In doing so, I include comments from Susan and Edward on developing their existing information behaviors into academic research skills, and I offer questions to help you consider your own information behaviors and research skills.

## UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION LITERACY

Before I work with you to move your information behaviors inside the online academic library, you need to understand the concept of information literacy. The American Library Association (ALA) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) define information literacy “a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (American Library Association). The ACRL further acknowledges that information literacy is “increasingly important in the contemporary environment of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources. Because of the escalating complexity of this environment, individuals are faced with diverse, abundant information choices” (Association of College and Research Libraries). In short, information literacy is a set of skills you need to understand, find, and use information.

I am certain that you are already familiar with conducting research on the Web, and I admit that finding information quickly and effortlessly is certainly alluring. But what about the reliability of the information you find? Do you ever question if the information you find is really accurate or true? If you have, then please know that you are not alone in your questions. You might even find some comfort in my belief that conducting sound academic research is more challenging now than at any other time in the history of the modern university.

## WRITING IN A GOOGLEPEDIA WORLD

Teachers Tiffany J. Hunt and Bud Hunt explain that the web-based encyclopedia Wikipedia is not just a collection of web pages built on *wiki* technology<sup>1</sup>, it is a web-based community of readers and writers, and a trusted one at that. Whereas most student users of Wikipedia trust the community of writers that contribute to the development of its pages of information, many teachers still criticize or disregard Wikipedia because of its open participation in the writing process, possible unreliability, and at times shallow coverage (Purdy 209), since “anyone, at any time, can modify by simply clicking on an ‘edit this page’ button found at the top of every Web entry” (Hunt and Hunt 91). However, the disregard for Wikipedia appears to be on the decline, and more and more users each day believe the “information is trustworthy and useful because, over time, many, many people have contributed their ideas, thoughts, passions, and the facts they learned both in school and in the world” (91). Wikipedia and Google are so much a part of the research process for writers today that to ignore their role and refuse to work with these tools seems ludicrous.

Still, the accuracy and verifiability of information are not as clear and consistent in many sources identified through Wikipedia and Google as they are with sources found in most libraries. For this reason, I am sure you have been steered away at least once from information obtained from search engines like Yahoo and Google as well as online encyclopedias like Answers.com and Wikipedia. Despite the resistance that’s out there, Alison J. Head and Michael Eisenberg from *Project Information Literacy* report from their interviews with groups of students on six college campuses that “Wikipedia was a unique and indispensable research source for students . . . there was a strong consensus among students that their research process began with [it]” (11). The suggestion by Head and Eisenberg that many students go to Google and Wikipedia first, and that many of them go to these websites in order to get a sense of the big picture (11), is confirmed in the advice offered by Purdy when he writes that Wikipedia allows you to “get a sense of the multiple aspects or angles” on a topic (209). Wikipedia brings ideas together on a single page as well as provides an accompanying narrative or summary that writers are often looking for during their research, particularly in the early stages of it. Head and Eisenberg term this Googlepedia-based information behavior “pre-

search,” specifically pre-researching a topic before moving onto more focused, serious, and often library-based research.

The concept of presearch is an important one for this chapter; Edward’s reliance on Wikipedia and Susan’s reliance on Google are not research crutches, but useful presearch tools. However, Edward and Susan admit they would not have made the research move into the virtual library to conduct database-oriented research without my intervention in the research process. Both students originally viewed this move like many students do, as simply unnecessary for most writing situations.

### Talkin’ Bout This Generation

Wikipedia might be the starting point for some writers; however, Google remains the starting point for most students I know. In fact, one group of researchers believes this information behavior—students’ affinity for all things “search engine”—is so prominent that it has dubbed the current generation of students “the Google Generation.” Citing not only a 2006 article from *EDUCAUSE Review* but also, interestingly enough, the Wikipedia discussion of the term, a group of researchers from University College London (UCL) note the “first port of call for knowledge [for the Google Generation] is the [I]nternet and a search engine, Google being the most popular” (Nicholas, Rowlands and Huntington 7). In other words, the UCL researchers argue that “students have already developed an ingrained coping behavior: they have learned to ‘get by’ with Google” (23). I believe we all are immersed and comfortable in the information world created by Googlepedia, yet there is much more to research than this.

Despite the fact that it would be easy and understandable to dismiss your information behaviors or to just tell you never to use Google or Wikipedia, I agree with teacher and author Troy Swanson when he argues, “We [teachers] need to recognize that our students enter our [college] classrooms with their own experiences as users of information” (265). In my attempt though to show you that research is more than just a five-minute stroll through Googlepedia, I first acknowledge what you already do when conducting research. I then use these behaviors as part of a process that is still quick, but much more efficient. By mirroring what writers do with Googlepedia and building on that process, this essay will significantly improve your research skills

and assist you with writing projects in college and your professional career.

### **The Wikipedia Hoax**

At this point in the chapter, let me pause to provide an example of why learning to be information literate and research savvy is so important. In his discussion of the “Wikipedia Hoax,” Associated Press writer Shawn Pogatchnik tells the story of University College Dublin student Shane Fitzgerald who “posted a poetic but phony” quote supposedly by French composer Maurice Jarre in order to test how the “Internet-dependent media was upholding accuracy and accountability.” Fitzgerald posted his fake quote on Wikipedia within hours of the composer’s death, and later found that several newspaper outlets had picked up and published the quote, even though the administrators of Wikipedia recognized and removed the bogus post. The administrators removed it quickly, “but not quickly enough to keep some journalists from cutting and pasting it first.”

It can safely be assumed these journalists exhibited nearly all of the information behaviors that most teachers and librarians find disconcerting:

- searching in Wikipedia or Google
- power browsing quickly through websites for ideas and quotes
- cutting-and-pasting information from the Web into one’s own writing without providing proper attribution for it
- viewing information as free, accurate, and trustworthy
- treating online information as equal to print information

Of course, it is impossible to actually prove the journalists used these behaviors without direct observation of their research processes, but it seems likely. In the end, their Googlepedia research hurt not only their writing, but also their credibility as journalists.

### **EDWARD, SUSAN, AND GOOGLEPEDIA**

Edward and Susan are two students comfortable in the world of Googlepedia, beginning and, in most cases, ending their research with a search engine (both students claimed to use Google over any other search engine) or online encyclopedia (both were only aware



of Wikipedia). Interestingly, Edward and Susan often move between Google and Wikipedia in the process of conducting their research, switching back and forth between the two sources of information when they believe the need exists.

For an upcoming research writing project on the topic of outsourcing American jobs, Susan chooses to begin her preliminary research with Google while Edward chooses to start with Wikipedia. The students engage in preliminary research, research at the beginning of the research writing process; yet, they work with a limited amount of information about the assignment, a situation still common in many college courses. The students know they have to write an argumentative essay of several pages and use at least five sources of information, sources they are required to find on their own. The students know the research-based essay is a major assignment for a college course, and they begin their searches in Googlepedia despite the sources available to them through the university library.

## Edward

Edward begins his research in Wikipedia, spending less than one minute to find and skim the summary paragraph on the main page for “outsourcing.” After reading the summary paragraph<sup>2</sup> to, in Edward’s words, “make sure I had a good understanding of the topic,” and scanning the rest of the main page (interestingly) from bottom to top, Edward focuses his reading on the page section titled “criticism.” Edward explains his focus,

Since I am writing an argumentative paper, I first skimmed the whole page for ideas that stood out. I then looked at the references for a clearly opinionated essay to see what other people are talking about and to compare my ideas [on the subject] to theirs,’ preferably if they have an opposing view.

This search for public opinion leads Edward to examine polls as well as skim related web pages linked to the Wikipedia page on outsourcing, and Edward quickly settles on the “reasons for outsourcing” in the criticism section of the Wikipedia page. Edward explains, “I am examining the pros of outsourcing as I am against it, and it seems that companies do not want to take responsibility for [outsourcing].”

It is at this point, barely fifteen minutes into his research, that Edward returns to the top of the Wikipedia main page on outsource-

ing to re-read the opening summary on the topic, as I stop him to discuss the thesis he is developing on corporate responsibility for the outsourcing problem. We discuss what I make of Edward's early research; Edward relies on Wikipedia for a broad overview, to verify his understanding on a subject.

### *Presearch into Research*

*Analysis:* Some teachers and librarians might argue against it, but I believe starting a search for information in Wikipedia has its benefits. It is difficult enough to write a college-level argumentative essay on a topic you know well. For a topic you know little about, you need to first learn more about it. Getting a basic understanding of the topic or issue through an encyclopedia, even an online one, has been a recommended practice for decades. Some librarians and teachers question the reliability of online encyclopedias like Wikipedia, but this is not the point of the instruction I am offering to you. I want you to keep going, to not stop your search after consulting Wikipedia. To use it as a starting point, not a final destination.

*Recommendation:* Deepen your understanding. Formulate a working thesis. Reread the pages as Edward has done here. This is recursive preliminary research, a process that will strengthen your research and your writing.

After our brief discussion to flush out his process in conducting research for an argumentative essay, I ask Edward to continue his research. Though he seems to identify a research focus, corporate responsibility, and working thesis—that American corporations should be held responsible for jobs they ship overseas—Edward still chooses to stay on the outsourcing page in Wikipedia to search for additional information.

He then searches the Wikipedia page for what he believes are links to expert opinions along with more specific sources that interest him and, in his approach to argumentative writing, contradict his opinion on the subject. Unlike Susan who later chooses to side with the majority opinion, Edward wants to turn his essay into a debate, regardless of where his ideas fall on the spectrum of public opinion.

### *Research and Critical/Creative Thinking*

*Analysis:* Edward's reliance on Wikipedia at this point is still not a concern. He is starting to link out to other resources, just as you should do. I, however, suggest that you spend more time at this point in your research to build your knowledge foundation. Your position on the issue should become clearer with the more you read, the more you talk to teachers and peers, and the more you explore the library and the open Web.

*Recommendation:* Keep exploring and branching out. Don't focus your research at this point. Let your research help focus your thinking.

Staying in Wikipedia leads Edward to texts such as "Outsourcing Bogeyman" and "Outsourcing Job Killer." Edward explains that his choices are largely based on the titles of the texts (clearly evident from these examples), not the authors, their credentials, the websites or sources that contain the texts, the URLs, or perhaps their domain names (e.g. .org, .edu, .net, .com)—characteristics of Web-based sources that most academic researchers consider. Even though Edward acknowledges that the source of the "Bogeyman" text is the journal *Business Week*, for example, he admits selecting the text based on the title alone, claiming "I don't read [*Business Week*], so I can't judge the source's quality."

### *Research and Credibility*

*Analysis:* Understanding the credentials of the author or source is particularly important in conducting sound academic research and especially during the age of the open Web. We live a world where most anyone with an Internet connection can post ideas and information to the Web. Therefore, it is always a good idea to understand and verify the sources of the information you use in your writing. Would you want to use, even unintentionally, incorrect information for a report you were writing at your job? Of course not. Understanding the credibility of a source is a habit of mind that should be practiced in your first year composition course and has value way beyond it.

*Recommendation:* Take a few minutes to establish the credibility of your sources. Knowing who said or wrote it, what credentials he or she has, what respect the publication, website,

or source has where you found the ideas and information, and discussing these concepts with your peers, librarian, and writing teacher should dramatically improve the essays and reports that result from your research.

What Edward trusts are the ideas contained in the text, believing the writer uses trustworthy information, thereby deferring source evaluation to the author of the text. For example, Edward comments of the “Job Killer” text, “After reading the first three paragraphs, I knew I was going to use this source.” Edward adds that the convincing factor is the author’s apparent reliance on two studies conducted at Duke University, each attempting to validate a different side of the outsourcing debate and the roles of corporations in it. From Edward’s statement, it is clear he needs help to better understand the criteria most scholars use for evaluating and selecting Web-based sources:

- Check the purpose of the website (the extension “.edu,” “.org,” “.gov,” “.com” can often indicate the orientation or purpose of the site).
- Locate and consider the author’s credentials to establish credibility.
- Look for recent updates to establish currency or relevancy.
- Examine the visual elements of the site such as links to establish relationships with other sources of information. (Clines and Cobb 2)

### *A Text’s Credibility Is Your Credibility*

*Analysis:* Viewed one way, Edward is trying to establish the credibility of his source. However, he doesn’t dig deep enough or perhaps is too easily convinced. What if the studies at Duke, for instance, were conducted by undergraduate students and not faculty members? Would that influence the quality of the research projects and their findings?

*Recommendation:* Know as much as you can about your source and do your best to present his or her credentials in your writing. As I tell my own students, give “props” to your sources when and where you can in the text of your essays and reports that incorporate source material. Lead-ins such as “Joe Smith, Professor of Art at Syracuse University, writes that . . .” are

especially helpful in giving props. Ask your teacher for more strategies to acknowledge your sources.

Edward's next step in his research process reveals more understanding than you might think. Interested in the Duke University studies cited in the "Job Killer" text, Edward moves from Wikipedia to Google in an attempt to find, in his words, "the original source and all its facts." This research move is not for the reason that I would have searched for the original text (I would be looking to verify the studies and validate their findings); still, Edward indicates that he always searches for and uses the original texts, what many teachers would agree is a wise decision. Finding the original studies in his initial Google query, Edward's research move here also reminds us of a new research reality: many original sources previously, and often only, available through campus libraries are now available through search engines like Google and Google Scholar.

After only thirty minutes into his preliminary research, it's the appropriate time for Edward to move his Googlepedia-based approach significantly into the academic world, specifically to the online library.

Before working with Edward to bring his Googlepedia-based research process together with a more traditional academic one, I ask Edward about library-based sources, particularly online databases. His response is the following: "I am more familiar with the Internet, so there is no reason [to use the library databases]. It is not that the library and databases are a hassle or the library is an uncomfortable space, but I can get this research done in bed." Edward's response is interesting here as it conflicts with the many reports that students often find the college library to be an intimidating place. Edward doesn't find the library to be overwhelming or intimidating; he finds the information in it *unnecessary* given the amount of information available via Googlepedia.

*But what if researching in the online library could be a more reliable and more efficient way to do research?*

## Susan

Susan begins her research where most students do, on Google. Interestingly, Susan does not start with the general topic of outsourcing, opting instead to let the search engine recommend related search terms. As Susan types in the term "outsourcing," Google as a search

engine builds on character recognition software providing several “suggestions” or related search terms, terms that Susan expects to be provided for her, and one—“outsourcing pros and cons”—quickly catches her attention. Commenting on this choice instead of searching by the general concept of outsourcing, Susan notes, “I would have to sort through too much stuff [on Google] before deciding what to do.” She selects “pros and cons” from the many related and limiting search terms suggested to her; Susan states, “I want both sides of the story because I don’t know much about it.”

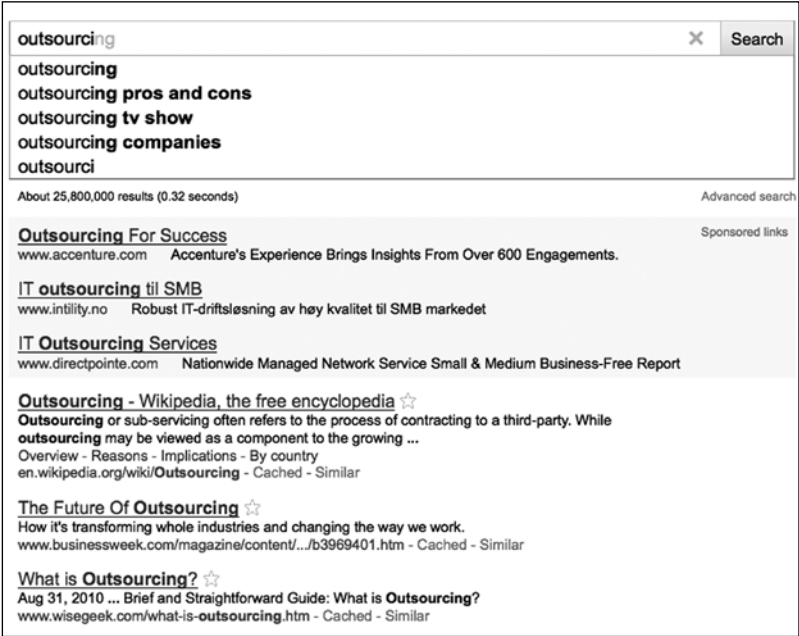


Fig. 1. Outsourcing suggestions from Google.

Susan next moves into examining the top ten returns provided on the first page of her Google search for outsourcing pros and cons. Doing what is now common practice for most Web users, Susan immediately selects the link for the first item returned in the query. I believe most search engine users are wired this way, even though they are likely familiar with the emphasis given to commercial sites on Google and other search engines. Quickly unsatisfied with this source, Susan jumps around on the first page of returns, stopping on the first visual she encounters on a linked page: a table illustrating pros and cons.

Asked why she likes the visual, Susan responds that she is trying to find out how many arguments exist for and against outsourcing. On this page, Susan notes the author provides seven pros and four cons for outsourcing. This finding leads Susan to believe that more pros likely exist and that her essay should be in support of outsourcing.

### *“Visual” Research*

*Analysis:* There are at least two points worthy of your attention here. First, Susan’s information behavior shows how attracted we all are to visuals (maps, charts, tables, diagrams, photos, images, etc.), particularly when they appear on a printed page or screen. Second, she fails to acknowledge a basic fact of research—that visual information of most any kind can be misleading. In the above example, Susan quickly deduces that more (7 pros vs. 4 cons) means more important or more convincing. Couldn’t it be possible that all or even any one of the cons is more significant than all of the pros taken together?

*Recommendation:* Consider using visuals as both researching and writing aids. However, analyze them as closely as you would a printed source. Also, examine the data for more than just the numbers. It might be a truism that numbers don’t lie, but it is up to you, as a writer, to explain what the numbers really mean.

Like Edward, Susan is not (initially) concerned about the credibility of the text (author’s credentials, source, sponsoring/hosting website, URL or domain, etc.); she appears only concerned with the information itself. When prodded, Susan mentions the text appears to be some form of press release, the URL seems legitimate, and the site appears credible. She fails to mention that the author’s information is not included on the text, but Susan quickly dismisses this: “The lack of author doesn’t bother me. It would only be a name anyway.” Susan adds that her goal is to get the research done “the easiest and fastest way I can.” These attitudes—there is so much information available in the Googlepedia world that the information stands on its own and the research process itself doesn’t need to take much time—appear to be a common misconception among students today, and the behaviors that result from them could possibly lead to flimsy arguments based on the multiplicity rather than the quality of information.

### *Research and CRAAP*

*Analysis:* I have referenced criteria for evaluating sources throughout this chapter. If you do not fully understand them, you should consult the resources below and talk with your teacher or a reference librarian.

*Recommendation:* Learn to put your sources to the CRAAP test (easy to remember, huh?):

- “*Currency:* The timeliness of the information.”
- “*Relevance:* The importance of the information for your needs.”
- “*Authority:* The source of the information.”
- “*Accuracy:* The reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the informational content.”
- “*Purpose:* The reason the information exists.”  
(Meriam Library)
  
- For specific questions to pose of your sources to evaluate each of these, visit the website for the developers of the CRAAP test at <http://www.csuchico.edu/lins/handouts/evalsites.html>. Another useful site is <http://www.gettysburg.edu/library/research/tips/webeval/index.dot>.

Unlike Edward, Susan is not concerned with engaging in a debate on the subject of outsourcing, regardless of her opinions on it. Susan views the assignment as I think many students would, another “get it done” research paper. Further, she believes the majority opinion, at least as it is discussed in the initial source she locates, should be *her* opinion in her essay. Susan explains, “I tend to take the side that I think I can make the stronger argument for . . . If it was a personal issue or an issue I was really interested in, like abortion, I wouldn’t do this. This topic doesn’t affect me though.”

### *Good Search Terms=Good Research Options*

*Analysis:* Susan needs to understand why being overly reliant on sources uncovered early on in the research process is a problem (particularly here where the search term pros comes before the search term cons likely leading to the results Susan has received). I hope you also share my concerns with the working



thesis she appears to be constructing, though I recognize that many students approach research papers just this way.

*Recommendation:* Improve your research by attempting at least a handful of Web searches using different key terms. If necessary, work with the search phrases and terms provided by the search engine. Also, place your search terms inside quotes on occasion to help vary and focus your search returns. Looking at the subject from different perspectives should help you gain a better sense of the topic and should lead you to a thesis and the development of an essay that is more convincing to your readers.

To her credit, Susan understands the need to validate the information provided by her first source, and she examines the original ten search returns for another text that might indicate the number of advantages and disadvantages to outsourcing. This search behavior of relying on the first page of returns provided by a search engine query has been widely documented, if nowhere else but in the experience of nearly every computer user. When was the last time you went to say the fourth or fifth page of returns on Google? Such a research move contradicts the power browsing nature of most of today's computer users, teachers and students alike. As Susan (perhaps, to some degree, rightly) explains, "The farther away from the first page, the less topic appropriate the articles become." I would contend this might be true of the thirty-seventh page of returns; yet, please understand that you should explore beyond the first page of returns when seeking out information via a search engine. Google your own name (last name first as well) some day to see just how curiously search returns are prioritized.

Next, Susan identifies a subsequent source, [www.outsource2india.com](http://www.outsource2india.com). This website provides the confirmation that Susan is looking for, noting sixteen pros and only twelve cons for outsourcing. At this point, Susan confirms her process for gathering source material for argumentative essays: she looks for two to three web-based articles that share similar views, particularly views that provide her with arguments, counterarguments, and rebuttals. Once she has an adequate list of points and has determined which side of a debate can be more effectively supported, Susan refines her Google search to focus only on that side of the debate.

### *Don't Rush to Argument*

*Analysis:* There are two concerns with Susan's research at this point: (1) her rush to research and (2) her rush to judgment.

*Recommendation:* In addition to reworking your research process with the help of the ideas presented in this chapter, consider building your understanding of writing academic arguments. In addition to your writing teacher and composition textbook, two sources to consult are [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac\\_paper/what.shtml#argument](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/what.shtml#argument) and <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/argument.html#2>.

Similar to the way she began searching for information only fifteen minutes earlier, Susan uses Google's "suggestions" to help her identify additional sources that support the side of the debate she has chosen to argue. As she types in "pros outsourcing," Susan identifies and selects "pro outsourcing statistics" from the recommended list of searches provided by Google in a drop-down menu. Like Edward, Susan is interested in validating the points she wants to use in her essay with research studies and scientific findings. Susan comments, "Statistics. Data. Science. They all make an argument stronger and not just opinion." Susan again relies on the first page of search results and focuses on title and URL to make her selections. As she finds information, she copies and pastes it along with the URL to a Word document, noting once she has her five sources with a blend of ideas and statistics together in a Word file that she will stop her research and start her writing.

### *Track Your Research/Give Props*

*Analysis:* Susan demonstrates here the common information behavior of cutting-and-pasting text or visuals from Web pages. She also demonstrates some understanding of the value of quantitative research and scientific proof. She also appears to use Word to create a working bibliography. These behaviors are far from perfect, but they can be of some help to you.

*Recommendation:* Learn to use an annotated bibliography. This type of research document will help you with both remembering and citing your sources. For more information on building an annotated bibliography, visit [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_4806881\\_construct-annotated-bibliography.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_4806881_construct-annotated-bibliography.html). There

are also many software and online applications such as Zotero and RefWorks that can help you collect and cite your sources. Next, make sure to do more than just cut-and-paste the ideas of others and the information you find on the Web into an essay or report of yours.<sup>3</sup> Learn to use paraphrases and summaries in addition to word-for-word passages and quotes. The Purdue OWL, a great resource for all things research and writing, explains options for incorporating research into your own writing: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/1/>. Finally, realize the value and limitations of statistics/numerical data and scientific findings. This type of research can be quite convincing as support for an argument, but it takes your explanations of the numbers and findings to make it so. You need to explain how the ideas of others relate to your thesis (and don't forget to give props).

### **Edward and Susan: Remix**

As you know by now, I certainly have concerns with Susan's and Edward's research process; however, I recognize that the process used by each of these students is not uncommon for many student researchers. More importantly, each process includes strategies which could be easily reworked in the digital library.

Yes, I am concerned that Susan doesn't recognize that you can find two or three sources on the Web that agree on just about anything, no matter how crazy that thing might be. Yes, I am concerned that Susan opts out of forming an argument that she truly believes in. Yes, I am concerned that both Susan and Edward trust information so quickly and fail to see a need to question their sources. Despite my concerns, and perhaps your own, their Googlepedia-based research process can provide the terms they need to complete the research in more sound and productive ways, and the process can be easily replicated in an online library.

Based on their Googlepedia research to this point, I suggest to Edward that he construct his essay as a rebuttal argument and that he use the search terms "outsourcing" and "corporate responsibility" to explore sources available to him from the library. For Susan, I suggest that she too construct a rebuttal argument and that she use the search string "outsourcing statistics" to explore sources in the university's vir-

tual library. (For more information on writing rebuttal arguments, visit <http://www.engl.niu.edu/wac/rebuttal.html>.)

Given the influence and value of using search engines like Google and online encyclopedias like Wikipedia in the research process, I recommend the following eight step research process to move from relying on instinctive information behaviors to acquiring solid research skills:

1. Use Wikipedia to get a sense of the topic and identify additional search terms.
2. Use Google to get a broader sense of the topic as well as verify information and test out search terms you found in Wikipedia.
3. Search Google again using quotation marks around your “search terms” to manage the number of results and identify more useful search terms.
4. Search Google Scholar ([scholar.google.com](http://scholar.google.com)) to apply the search terms in an environment of mostly academic and professional resources.
5. Do a limited search of “recent results or “since 2000” on Google Scholar to manage the number of results and identify the most current resources.
6. Search your college’s library research databases using your college library’s web portal: to apply the search terms in an environment of the most trusted academic and professional resources.
7. Focus your search within at least one general academic database such as Academic Search Premier, Proquest Complete, Lexis/Nexis Academic Universe, or CQ Researcher to apply the search terms in a trusted environment and manage the number of results.
8. Do a limited search by year and “full text” returns using the same general academic database(s) you used in step 7 to reduce the number of results and identify the most current resources.

I admit that this process will certainly seem like a lot of work to you, but I want to emphasize that Edward and Susan completed this sequence in less than thirty minutes. After doing so, Edward even commented, “If someone had shown me this in high school, I wouldn’t be going to Wikipedia and Google like I do.” Susan added that even

with her search terms, Google still presented challenges in terms of the number of potential sources: "Google had thousands of hits while Galileo might have less than 100." For students who value speed and ease, this remixed process resonated with them, and I believe it will with you.

More importantly, the remixed process addresses some of the concerns that could have hindered the research and writing of both students if they only worked with Googlepedia. By remixing and sequencing research this way, they worked with issues of currency, credibility, accuracy and bias among others, criteria vital to conducting sound research. This is not to say that Susan and Edward failed to understand or could not apply these concepts, particularly given that our research time was limited to sixty minutes total (thirty minutes researching alone plus thirty minutes for cooperative research). However, any student who makes this research move will find a more viable and valuable research path. As Edward said, "[The library sources] produced a narrowed search pattern and created less results based on a more reliable pool from which to pull the information."

The research approach I am suggesting can be quick and easy, and it can also be more connected to the values of researchers and the skills of adept information users. Don't take just my word for it though. Consider Susan's closing comment from the questionnaire she completed after our research session:

I really hadn't ever thought of using library sources in looking up information because I've always used open Web resources. I now know the benefits of using library sources and how they can simplify my search. I found being able to categorize articles by date and relevancy very helpful . . . I am inclined to change the way I research papers from using the open Web to using library sources because they are more valid and it's as easy to use as Google.

In just a single one-hour-long preliminary research session, Susan and Edward were able to utilize the research behaviors they were comfortable with, were encouraged to continue starting their research in Googlepedia, and learned to remix their behaviors inside the online library. Working on your own or with a teacher or librarian to make the research move from Googlepedia to the library, as I suggest in this

chapter, should help to improve the quality of your research and your writing based upon it.

## CONCLUSION

Susan Blum notes that “if we want to teach students to comply with academic norms of [research], it may be helpful to contrast their ordinary textual practices—rich, varied, intersecting, constant, ephemeral, speedy—with the slower and more careful practices required in the academy” (16). Working through the research process as we have in this chapter, we are moving away from *the* research process to a combination of *our* process, as librarians and teachers, with *your* process—a process that blends technological comfort and savvy with academic standards and rigor. I believe this combination makes for an intellectual, real, and honest approach for researching in the digital age. Blum comments, “By the time we punish students, we have failed. So let’s talk. These text-savvy students may surprise us” (16). Susan and Edward have done just that for me, and I hope you have learned a little from them, too.

## DISCUSSION

1. In the discussion of Edward’s preliminary research, several characteristics of a Web-based source that most academic researchers consider are mentioned including the title of the webtext, the author, his or her credentials, the website or source that contains the webtext, the URL, and the domain name (e.g. .org, .edu, .net, .com). What characteristic or characteristics do you examine if any? Which ones do you believe are the most important? Why?
2. Susan mentions that she “would have to sift through too much stuff” when searching for information on Google. Do you agree that Google provides too much information to examine? Why or why not? In addition to Susan’s approach of using a search term suggested by Google, what strategies do you have for limiting the information returned to you when seeking information using a search engine?
3. Type your name or your favorite subject into a search engine, such as Google or Yahoo. What do you notice about the search

returns? How do the returns appear to be prioritized? From the results you see, consider how the rankings of returns could help and hurt your research for an academic paper if you relied only on a search engine for your information. Discuss your response with a group of classmates.

4. Try working with Susan's search terms in reverse—the “cons” and “pros” of outsourcing. Use a search engine like Google or Yahoo to compare the results when you switch the order of search terms. How are the results for the “cons and pros of outsourcing” similar to and different from the results for the search for the “pros and cons of outsourcing”? Discuss your findings with a group of classmates.

## NOTES

1. Wikis are websites that allow a user to add new web pages or edit any page and have the changes he or she makes integrated into that page.

2. See pages 209–211 in Purdy for more discussion on the value of Wikipedia in preliminary research.

3. See pages 217–218 in Purdy for an example of a student engaging in written conversation with her sources rather than just “parroting” them.

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# Walk, Talk, Cook, Eat: A Guide to Using Sources

by Cynthia R. Haller

This essay is a chapter in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, Volume 2, a peer-reviewed open textbook series for the writing classroom.

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# Walk, Talk, Cook, Eat: A Guide to Using Sources

*Cynthia R. Haller*

*Marvin, a college student at Any University, sits down at his computer.\* He logs in to the “Online Professor,” an interactive advice site for students. After setting up a chat, he begins tapping the keys.*

Marvin: Hi. I’m a student in the physician assistant program. The major paper for my health and environment class is due in five weeks, and I need some advice. The professor says the paper has to be 6–8 pages, and I have to cite and document my sources.

O-Prof: Congratulations on getting started early! Tell me a bit about your assignment. What’s the purpose? Who’s it intended for?

Marvin: Well, the professor said it should talk about a health problem caused by water pollution and suggest ways to solve it. We’ve read some articles, plus my professor gave us statistics on groundwater contamination in different areas.

O-Prof: What’s been most interesting so far?

Marvin: I’m amazed at how much water pollution there is. It seems like it would be healthier to drink bottled water, but the plastic bottles hurt the environment.

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O-Prof: Who else might be interested in this?

Marvin: Lots of people are worried about bad water. I might even get questions about it from my clients once I finish my program.

O-Prof: OK. So what information do you need to make a good recommendation?

*Marvin thinks for a moment.*

Marvin: I don't know much about the health problems caused by contaminated drinking water. Whether the tap water is safe depends on where you live, I guess. The professors talked about arsenic poisoning in Bangladesh, but what about the water in the U.S.? For my paper, maybe I should focus on a particular location? I also need to find out more about what companies do to make sure bottled water is pure.

O-Prof: Good! Now that you know what you need to learn, you can start looking for sources.

Marvin: When my professors talk about sources, they usually mean books or articles about my topic. Is that what you mean?

O-Prof: Books and articles do make good sources, but you might think about sources more generally as "forms of meaning you use to make new meaning." It's like your bottled water. The water exists already in some location but is processed by the company before it goes to the consumer. Similarly, a source provides information and knowledge that you process to produce new meaning, which other people can then use to make their own meaning.

*A bit confused, Marvin scratches his head.*

Marvin: I thought I knew what a source was, but now I'm not so sure.

O-Prof: Think about it. Sources of meaning are literally everywhere—for example, your own observations or experiences, the content of other people's brains, visuals and graphics, experiment results, TV and radio broadcasts, and written texts. And, there are many ways to make new meaning from sources. You can give an oral presentation, design a web page, paint a picture, or, as in your case, write a paper.

Marvin: I get it. But how do I decide which sources to use for my paper?

O-Prof: It depends on the meaning you want to make, which is why it's *so* important to figure out the purpose of your paper and who will read it. You might think about using sources as *walking, talking, cooking, and eating*. These aren't the only possible metaphors, but they do capture some important things about using sources.

Marvin: Hey! I thought we were talking about writing!

O-Prof: We are, but these metaphors can shed some light on writing with sources. Let's start with the first one: *walking*. To use sources well, you first have to go where they are. What if you were writing an article on student clubs for the school newspaper? Where would you go for information?

Marvin: I'd probably walk down to the Student Activities office and get some brochures about student clubs. Then I'd attend a few club meetings and maybe interview the club leaders and some members about their club activities.

O-Prof: OK, so you'd *walk* to where you could find relevant information for your article. That's what I mean by *walking*. You have to get to the sources you need.

Marvin: Wait a minute. For the article on student clubs, maybe I could save some walking. Maybe the list of clubs and the club descriptions are on the Student Activities web page. That'd save me a trip.

O-Prof: Yes, the Internet has cut down on the amount of physical walking you need to do to find sources. Before the Internet, you had to either travel to a source's physical location, or bring that source to your location. Think about your project on bottled water. To get information about the quality of a city's tap water in the 1950s, you would have had to figure out who'd have that information, then call or write to request a copy or *walk* to wherever the information was stored. Today, if you type "local water quality" into Google, the Environmental Protection Agency page comes up as one of the first hits. Its home page links to water quality reports for local areas.

*Marvin pauses for a second before responding, thinking he's found a good short cut for his paper.*

Marvin: So can I just use Google or Bing to find sources?

O-Prof: Internet search engines can help you find sources, but they aren't always the best route to getting to a good source. Try entering the search term "bottled water quality" into Google, without quotation marks around the term. How many hits do you get?

*Marvin types it in.*

Marvin: 5,760,000. That's pretty much what I get whenever I do an Internet search. Too many results.

O-Prof: Which is one of the drawbacks of using only Internet search engines. The Internet may have cut down on the physical *walking* needed to find good sources, but it's made up for the time savings by pointing you to more places than you could possibly go! But there are some ways you can narrow your search to get fewer, more focused results.

Marvin: Yeah, I know. Sometimes I add extra words in and it helps weed down the hits.

O-Prof: By combining search terms with certain words or symbols, you can control what the search engine looks for. If you put more than one term into a Google search box, the search engine will only give you sites that include both terms, since it uses the Boolean operator AND as the default for its searches. If you put OR between two search terms, you'll end up getting even more results, because Google will look for all websites containing either of the terms. Using a minus sign in front of a term eliminates things you're not interested in. It's the Google equivalent of the Boolean operator NOT. Try entering bottled water quality health -teeth.

*Marvin types in the words, remembering suddenly that he has to make an appointment with the dentist.*

Marvin: 329,000 hits.

O-Prof: Still a lot. You can also put quotation marks around groups of words and the search engine will look only for sites that contain all of those words in the exact order you've given. And you can combine this strategy with the other ways of limiting your search. Try "bottled water quality" (in quotation marks) health teeth.

Marvin: Only 333. That's more like it.

O-Prof: Yes, but you don't want to narrow it so far that you miss useful sources. You have to play around with your search terms to get to what you need. A bigger problem with Internet search engines, though, is that they won't necessarily lead you to the sources considered most valuable for college writing.

Marvin: My professor said something about using peer-reviewed articles in scholarly journals.

O-Prof: Professors will often want you to use such sources. Articles in scholarly journals are written by experts; and if a journal's peer-reviewed, its articles have been screened by other experts (the authors' peers) before being published.

Marvin: So that would make peer-reviewed articles pretty reliable. Where do I find them?

O-Prof: Google's got a specialized search engine, Google Scholar, that will search for scholarly articles that might be useful ([www.google.com/scholar](http://www.google.com/scholar)). But often the best place is the college library's bibliographic databases. A database is a collection of related data, usually electronic, set up for easy access to items in the collection. Library bibliographic databases contain articles from newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals, and other publications. They can be very large, but they're a lot smaller than the whole Internet, and they generally contain reliable information. The Internet, on the other hand, contains both good and bad information.

*Marvin looks down at his feet.*

Marvin: Sounds sort of like looking for shoes. When I was buying my running shoes, I went to a specialty running shop instead of a regular shoe store. The specialty shop had all the brands I

was looking for, and I didn't have to weed through sandals and dress shoes. Is that kind of like a library's bibliographic database?

O-Prof: Exactly. But remember, a database search engine can only find what's actually in the database. If you're looking for information on drinking water, you won't find much in a database full of art history publications. The library has some subject guides that can tell you the best databases to use for your topic.

Marvin: What about books? I did check out the library catalog and found a couple of good books on my topic.

O-Prof: Yes, don't forget about books. You generally have to walk physically to get information that's only in print form, or have someone else bring it to you. Even though Google has now scanned many of the world's books into its database, they won't give you access to the entire book if the book is still under copyright.

Marvin: So I'm back to real walking again.

O-Prof: Yes. Don't forget to ask for help when you're looking around for sources. Reference librarians make very good guides; it's their job to keep up on where various kinds of knowledge are located and help people find that knowledge. Professors also make good guides, but they're most familiar with where to find knowledge in their own fields.

Marvin: I could ask my health and environment professor for help, of course, and maybe my geology and chemistry professors. I'm guessing my music teacher would be less helpful.

O-Prof: One last hint about finding sources. If you find an article or book that's helpful for your paper, look at its reference list. There might be some useful sources listed there.

Marvin: Thanks, Professor. I think I can do some good *walking* now. What about that *talking* metaphor?

O-Prof: Before we move on, there's an important aspect of *walking* with sources that you need to be aware of. In college writing, if you use a source in a paper, you're expected to let the reader know exactly how to find that source as well. Providing this

“source address” information for your sources is known as *documenting your sources*.

Marvin: What do you mean by a “source address”?

O-Prof: It’s directions for finding the source. A mailing address tells you how to find a person: the house number, street, city, state, and zip code. To help your readers find your sources, it’s customary to give them the name of the author; the title of the book or article or website; and other information such as date, location of publication, publisher, even the database in which a source is located. Or, if it’s a website, you might give the name of the site and/or the date on which you accessed it. Source documentation can be complicated, because the necessary source address information differs for different types of sources (e.g., books vs. journal articles, electronic vs. print). Additionally, different disciplines (e.g., history, philosophy, psychology, literature, etc.) use different “address” formats. Eventually, you’ll become familiar with the documentation conventions for your own academic major, but source documentation takes a lot of practice. In the meantime, your teachers and various writing handbooks can provide instructions on what information you’ll need.

Marvin: Do I really need to include all that information? A lot of times, the sources I use are readings my teachers have assigned, so they already know where to find them.

O-Prof: Your teachers don’t always know where all your sources are from, and they also want you to get into the habit of source documentation. And what about your other readers? If they’re deeply interested in your topic, they may want to find more information than you’ve included in your paper. Your source documentation allows them to find the original source. And there are other reasons for documenting sources. It can help readers understand your own position on a topic, because they can see which authors you agree with and which you don’t. It also shows readers you’ve taken time to investigate your topic and aren’t just writing off the top of your head. If readers see that your ideas are based on trustworthy sources, they’re more likely to trust what you say.



Marvin: Like, if I used a university or government website on bottled water quality, they'd trust me more than if I just used a bottled water company website.

O-Prof: Yes. But to dig deeper into the question of trust, let's move on to a second metaphor: *talking*. Although the metaphor of *walking* is useful for understanding how to find and document sources, it can give the impression that sources are separate, inert, and neutral things, waiting to be snatched up like gold nuggets and plugged into your writing. In reality, sources are parts of overlapping knowledge networks that connect meanings and the people that make and use them. Knowledge networks are always in flux, since people are always making new meaning. Let's go back to your health and environment project. Refresh my memory. What kinds of questions do you need answers to before you can write your paper?

Marvin: Well, I need to know if bottled water is truly healthier, like the beverage companies claim. Or would I be just as well off drinking tap water?

O-Prof: To answer this question, you'll want to find out who's *talking* about these issues. As Kenneth Burke put it, you can think of sources as voices in an ongoing conversation about the world:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (110–111)

The authors of texts aren't speaking aloud, of course, but they're making written statements that others can "listen" and "respond" to. Knowing which texts you can trust means understanding which authors you can trust.

Marvin: How do I figure that out?

O-Prof: It helps to know who the authors are. What they're saying. Where, when, and to whom they're saying it. And what their purposes are. Imagine the world as divided into many parlors like the one Kenneth Burke described. You'd want to go to the parlors where people who really know something are *talking* about the topics you're interested in. Let's go back to your initial Google search for a minute. Did any Wikipedia articles come up for bottled water?

Marvin: Yeah, and I took a quick look at one of them. But some of my professors say I shouldn't use Wikipedia.

O-Prof: That's because the quality of information in Wikipedia varies. It's monitored by volunteer writers and editors rather than experts, so you should double-check information you find in Wikipedia with other sources. But Wikipedia articles are often good places to get background info and good places to connect with more reliable sources. Did anything in the Wikipedia article seem useful for finding sources on bottled water?

*Marvin clicks back to the Wikipedia site.*

Marvin: It does mention that the National Resources Defense Council and the Drinking Water Research Foundation have done some studies on the health effects of bottled water ("Bottled Water").

O-Prof: So, you could go to the websites for these organizations to find out more about the studies. They might even have links to the full reports of these studies, as well as other resources on your topic. Who else might have something to say about the healthfulness of bottled and tap water?

Marvin: Maybe doctors and other health professionals? But I don't know any I could ask.

O-Prof: You can look in the library's subject guides or ask the librarian about databases for health professionals. The Cumulative Index to Nursing & Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) database is a good one. Are you logged in to the library? Can you try that one?

*Marvin logs in, finds the database, and types in "bottled water AND health."*

Marvin: Here's an article called "Health Risks and Benefits of Bottled Water." It's in the journal *Primary Care Clinical Office Practice* (Napier and Kodner).

O-Prof: If that's a peer-reviewed journal, it might be a good source for your paper.

Marvin: Here's another one: "Socio-Demographic Features and Fluoride Technologies Contributing to Higher Fluorosis Scores in Permanent Teeth of Canadian Children" (Maupome et al.). That one sounds pretty technical.

O-Prof: And pretty narrow, too. When you start using sources written by experts, you move beyond the huge porch of public discourse, where everyone *talks* about all questions on a general level, into some smaller conversational parlors, where groups of specialists *talk* about more narrow questions in greater depth. You generally find more detailed and trustworthy knowledge in these smaller parlors. But sometimes the conversation may be too narrow for your needs and difficult to understand because it's experts *talking* to experts.

*Way ahead of the professor, Marvin's already started reading about the health risks and benefits of bottled water.*

Marvin: Here's something confusing. The summary of this article on risks and benefits of bottled water says tap water is fine if you're in a location where there's good water. Then it says that you should use bottled water if the purity of your water source is in question. So which is better, tap or bottled?

O-Prof: As you read more sources, you begin to realize there's not always a simple answer to questions. As the CINAHL article points out, the answer depends on whether your tap water is

pure enough to drink. Not everyone agrees on the answers, either. When you're advising your future clients (or in this case, writing your paper), you'll need to "listen" to what different people who *talk* about the healthfulness of bottled and tap water have to say. Then you'll be equipped to make your own recommendation.

Marvin: Is that when I start writing?

O-Prof: You've really been writing all along. Asking questions and gathering ideas from sources is all part of the process. As we think about the actual drafting, though, it's helpful to move on to that third metaphor: *cooking*. When you *cook* with sources, you process them in new ways. Cooking, like writing, involves a lot of decisions. For instance, you might decide to combine ingredients in a way that keeps the full flavor and character of each ingredient.

Marvin: Kind of like chili cheese fries? I can taste the flavor of the chili, the cheese, and the fries separately.

O-Prof: Yes. But other food preparation processes can change the character of the various ingredients. You probably wouldn't enjoy gobbling down a stick of butter, two raw eggs, a cup of flour, or a cup of sugar (well, maybe the sugar!). But if you mix these ingredients and expose them to a 375-degree temperature, chemical reactions transform them into something good to eat, like a cake.

*Marvin reaches into his backpack and pulls out a snack.*

Marvin: You're making me hungry. But what do chili cheese fries and cakes have to do with writing?

O-Prof: Sometimes, you might use verbatim quotations from your sources, as if you were throwing walnuts whole into a salad. The reader will definitely "taste" your original source. Other times, you might paraphrase ideas and combine them into an intricate argument. The flavor of the original source might be more subtle in the latter case, with only your source documentation indicating where your ideas came from. In some ways, the writing assignments your professors give you are like recipes. As an apprentice writing *cook*, you should

analyze your assignments to determine what “ingredients” (sources) to use, what “cooking processes” to follow, and what the final “dish” (paper) should look like. Let’s try a few sample assignments. Here’s one:

**Assignment 1: Critique** (given in a human development course)

We’ve read and studied Freud’s theory of how the human psyche develops; now it’s time to evaluate the theory. Read at least two articles that critique Freud’s theory, chosen from the list I provided in class. Then, write an essay discussing the strengths and weaknesses of Freud’s theory.

Assume you’re a student in this course. Given this assignment, how would you describe the required ingredients, processes, and product?

*Marvin thinks for a minute, while chewing and swallowing a mouthful of apple.*

Marvin: Let’s see if I can break it down:

**Ingredients:**

- everything we’ve read about Freud’s theory
- our class discussions about the theory
- two articles of my choice taken from the list provided by the instructor

**Processes:** I have to read those two articles to see their criticisms of Freud’s theory. I can also review my notes from class, since we discussed various critiques. I have to think about what aspects of Freud’s theory explain human development well, and where the theory falls short—like in class, we discussed how Freud’s theory reduces human development to sexuality alone.

**Product:** The final essay needs to include both strengths and weaknesses of Freud’s theory. The professor didn’t specifically say this, but it’s also clear I need to incorporate some ideas from the two articles I read—otherwise why would she have assigned those articles?

O-Prof: Good. How about this one?

**Assignment 2: Business Plan** (given in an entrepreneurship course)

As your major project for this course, your group will develop a business plan for a student-run business that meets some need on this campus. Be sure to include all aspects of a business plan. During the last few weeks of class, each group will present the plan to the class, using appropriate visuals.

Marvin: I'll give it a try.

**Ingredients:** Hmm . . . It's hard to tell the sources I'll need. Obviously, whatever the teacher teaches us about business plans in the course will be important—hope she goes into detail about this and provides examples. What if she doesn't? What sources could my group use? Our textbook has a chapter on business plans that will probably help, and maybe we can go to the library and look for books about writing business plans. Some sample business plans would be helpful—I wonder if the Center for Small Business Support on our campus would have some?

**Processes:** Well, maybe we could have each member of the group look for sources about business plans and then meet together to discuss what we need to do, or talk online. Don't know how we'll break down the writing—maybe we could divide up the various sections of the plan, or discuss each section together, then someone could write it up?

**Product:** It's clear that we have to include all the information that business owners put in a business plan, and we'll have to follow the organization of a typical plan. But we can't tell exactly what that organization should be until we've done some research.

O-Prof: Here's one last assignment to try out.

**Assignment 3: Research Paper** (given in a health and environment course)

Write a 6–8-page paper in which you explain a health problem related to water pollution (e.g., arsenic poisoning, gastrointestinal illness, skin disease, etc.). Recommend a potential

way or ways this health problem might be addressed. Be sure to cite and document the sources you use for your paper.

Marvin: Oho, trick question! That one sounds familiar.

**Ingredients:** No specific guidance here, except that sources have to relate to water pollution and health. I've already decided I'm interested in how bottled water might help with health where there's water pollution. I'll have to pick a health problem and find sources about how water pollution can cause that problem. Gastrointestinal illness sounds promising. I'll ask the reference librarian where I'd be likely to find good articles about water pollution, bottled water, and gastrointestinal illness.

**Process:** There's not very specific information here about what process to use, but our conversation's given me some ideas. I'll use scholarly articles to find the connection between water pollution and gastrointestinal problems, and whether bottled water could prevent those problems.

**Product:** Obviously, my paper will explain the connection between water and gastrointestinal health. It'll evaluate whether bottled water provides a good option in places where the water's polluted, then give a recommendation about what people should do. The professor did say I should address any objections readers might raise—for instance, bottled water may turn out to be a good option, but it's a lot more expensive than tap water. Finally, I'll need to provide in-text citations and document my sources in a reference list.

O-Prof: You're on your way. Think for a minute about these three assignments. Did you notice that the "recipes" varied in their specificity?

Marvin: Yeah. The first assignment gave me very specific information about exactly what source "ingredients" to use. But in the second and third assignments, I had to figure it out on my own. And the processes varied, too. For the business plan, the groups will use sources to figure out how to organize the plan, but the actual content will be drawn from their own ideas for their business and any market research they do. But in the third assignment—my own assignment—I'll have to use content from my sources to support my recommendation.

- O-Prof: Different professors provide different levels of specificity in their writing assignments. If you have trouble figuring out the “recipe,” ask the professor for more information.
- Marvin: Sometimes it can be really frustrating not to have enough information. Last semester, I sat around being frustrated and put off doing an assignment as long as possible, then rushed to finish it. I didn’t do very well on the rough draft, but then I met with my professor and talked to him. Also, the class read each other’s papers. Getting feedback and looking at what other students had done gave me some new ideas for my final draft.
- O-Prof: When it comes to “cooking with sources,” no one expects you to be an executive chef the first day you get to college. Over time, you’ll become more expert at writing with sources, more able to choose and use sources on your own. You’ll probably need less guidance for writing in your senior year than in your freshman year. Which brings me to the last metaphor for using sources.
- Marvin: *Eating*, right?
- O-Prof: Good memory. In fact, this last metaphor is about memory, which is how sources become a part of who you are. You’ve probably heard the expression, “you are what you eat.” When you *eat* sources—that is, think about things, experiment, read, write, talk to others—you yourself change. What you learn stays with you.
- Marvin: Not always. It’s hard for me to remember the things I learn in class until the final exam, not to mention after the class is over.
- O-Prof: Of course. We all forget a lot of the things we learn, especially those we seldom or never use again; but what you learn and use over a long period of time will affect you deeply and shape the way you see the world. Take a look at this quote from Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi*, where the narrator’s talking about his apprenticeship as a steamboat pilot. When he first began his apprenticeship, the Mississippi River looked the same as any other river. But after he made many long trips up and down it, with the captain and others



explaining things along the way, he began to see it in all its complexity.

The face of the water, in time, became a wonderful book—a book that was a dead language to the uneducated passenger, but which told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice. (77–78)

Eventually, the narrator could identify each of the river's bends, knew how its currents were running, and could estimate how deep it was just by looking at the surface. It was the same river, but he was a different man. Your bottled water project isn't as involved as learning to pilot a steamship. But once you start reading your sources, your experience of bottled water will shift. It'll still be the same water you used to drink, but it won't be the same you.

Marvin: I can sort of see that already. I've learned a lot about anatomy and physiology in the physician assistant program. Now, when I see a soccer player, I think about how the shin guard is protecting her tibia, not her shin. If I see someone with yellowish eyeballs, I think about bilirubin levels. And I always read the health section of the newspaper first.

O-Prof: Right. And a journalism major, who takes courses on beat reporting and feature writing, thinks about what will make a good story. A geology major does field work, looks at maps, learns about geological history, and sees rocks everywhere. Over time, through much exposure to a field and practice in it, a person's identity gradually becomes intertwined with his or her profession. Not entirely, of course. All of us are many things. A doctor may have an interest in calligraphy. A business manager might study poetry in her spare time. In both work and leisure activities, you'll keep on learning and making meaning from sources like other people, writing, books, websites, videos, articles, and your own experience. College is about learning *how* to make meaning. Learn how to *walk* (find the sources you need); *talk* (converse with source authors); *cook* (integrate sources to make new meaning); and *eat* (allow sources to change your life). You won't ever finish using sources to make meaning—not in your health and en-

vironment course, not while you're in college, not even after you've been working and living for a long time.

*Marvin glances at his watch.*

Marvin: Speaking of time, I should probably grab some dinner before the cafeteria closes. Thanks, Professor, for all your help.

O-Prof: Anytime. Good luck with your paper, and with the rest of your writing life.

## DISCUSSION

1. What writing assignments have you received from your various professors? How many of them involve working with sources? What kinds of sources do your professors ask you to use?
2. What difficulties have you encountered in finding good sources for writing assignments? How have you overcome those difficulties?
3. How helpful is the “recipe analysis” technique for understanding how to go about your assignments? What other analysis techniques have you used to understand writing assignments?
4. The metaphors in this dialogue explain some aspects of using sources, but not others. What other metaphors can you think of for working with sources? How would those other metaphors add to an understanding of writing with sources?

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# Annoying Ways People Use Sources

by Kyle D. Stedman

This essay is a chapter in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, Volume 2, a peer-reviewed open textbook series for the writing classroom.

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# Annoying Ways People Use Sources

*Kyle D. Stedman*

## HOW SLOW DRIVING IS LIKE SLOPPY WRITING

I hate slow drivers.\* When I'm driving in the fast lane, maintaining the speed limit exactly, and I find myself behind someone who thinks the fast lane is for people who drive ten miles per hour *below* the speed limit, I get an annoyed feeling in my chest like hot water filling a heavy bucket. I wave my arms around and yell, "What . . . ? But, hey . . . oh come *on!*" There are at least two explanations for why some slow drivers fail to move out of the way:

1. They don't know that the generally accepted practice of highway driving in the U.S. is to move to the right if an upcoming car wants to pass. Or,
2. They know the guidelines but don't care.

But here's the thing: writers can forget that their readers are sometimes just as annoyed at writing that fails to follow conventions as drivers are when stuck behind a car that fails to move over. In other words, there's something similar between these two people: the knowledgeable driver who thinks, "I thought all drivers *knew* that the left lane is

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for the fastest cars,” and the reader who thinks, “I thought all writers *knew* that outside sources should be introduced, punctuated, and cited according to a set of standards.”

One day, you may discover that something you’ve written has just been read by a reader who, unfortunately, was annoyed at some of the ways you integrated sources. She was reading along and then suddenly exclaimed, “What . . . ? But, hey . . . oh come *on!*” If you’re lucky, this reader will try to imagine why you typed things the way you did, giving you the benefit of the doubt. But sometimes you’ll be slotted into positions that might not really be accurate. When this frustrated reader walks away from your work, trying to figure out, say, why you used so many quotations, or why you kept starting and ending paragraphs with them, she may come to the same conclusions I do about slow drivers:

1. You don’t know the generally accepted practices of using sources (especially in academic writing) in the U.S. Or,
2. You know the guidelines but don’t care.

And it will be a lot harder for readers to take you seriously if they think you’re ignorant or rude.

This judgment, of course, will often be unfair. These readers might completely ignore the merits of your insightful, stylistically beautiful, or revolutionarily important language—just as my anger at another driver makes me fail to admire his custom paint job. But readers and writers don’t always see eye to eye on the same text. In fact, some things I write about in this essay will only bother your pickiest readers (some teachers, some editors, some snobby friends), while many other readers might zoom past how you use sources without blinking. But in my experience, I find that teachers do a disservice when we fail to alert students to the kind of things that some readers might be annoyed at—however illogical these things sometimes seem. People are often unreasonably picky, and writers have to deal with that—which they do by trying to anticipate and preemptively fix whatever might annoy a broad range of readers. Plus, the more effectively you anticipate that pickiness, the more likely it is that readers will interpret your quotations and paraphrases in the way you want them to—critically or acceptingly, depending on your writing context.

It helps me to remember that the conventions of writing have a fundamentally *rhetorical* nature. That is, I follow different conventions depending on the purpose and audience of my writing, because I know that I'll come across differently to different people depending on how well I follow the conventions expected in any particular writing space. In a blog, I cite a source by hyperlinking; in an academic essay, I use a parenthetical citation that refers to a list of references at the end of the essay. One of the fundamental ideas of rhetoric is that speakers/writers/composers shape what they say/write/create based on what they want it to do, where they're publishing it, and what they know about their audience/readers. And those decisions include nitty-gritty things like introducing quotations and citing paraphrases clearly: not everyone in the entire world approaches these things the same way, but when I strategically learn the expectations of my U.S. academic audience, what I really want to say comes across smoothly, without little annoying blips in my readers' experience. Notice that I'm not saying that there's a particular *right* or *wrong* way to use conventions in my writing—if the modern U.S. academic system had evolved from a primarily African or Asian or Latin American cultural consciousness instead of a European one, conventions for writing would probably be very different. That's why they're *conventions* and not *rules*.

### The Annoyances

Because I'm not here to tell you *rules*, *decrees*, or *laws*, it makes sense to call my classifications *annoyances*. In the examples that follow, I wrote all of the annoying examples myself, but all the examples I use of good writing come from actual student papers in first year composition classes at my university; I have their permission to quote them.

#### Armadillo Roadkill

Everyone in the car hears it: buh-BUMP. The driver insists to the passengers, "But that armadillo—I didn't see it! It just came out of nowhere!"

*Armadillo Roadkill:  
dropping in a quotation  
without introducing it  
first*

Sadly, a poorly introduced quotation can lead readers to a similar exclamation: "It just came out of nowhere!" And though readers probably won't experience the same level of grief and regret when surprised by a quotation as opposed to an armadillo, I submit that there's a kinship between the experiences: both involve a

normal, pleasant activity (driving; reading) stopped suddenly short by an unexpected barrier (a sudden armadillo; a sudden quotation).

Here's an example of what I'm talking about:

We should all be prepared with a backup plan if a zombie invasion occurs. "Unlike its human counterparts, an army of zombies is completely independent of support" (Brooks 155). Preparations should be made in the following areas. . . .

Did you notice how the quotation is dropped in without any kind of warning? (Buh-BUMP.)

**The Fix:** The easiest way to effectively massage in quotations is by purposefully returning to each one in your draft to see if you set the stage for your readers—often, by signaling that a quote is about to come, stating who the quote came from, and showing how your readers should interpret it. In the above example, that could be done by introducing the quotation with something like this (new text bolded):

We should all be prepared with a backup plan if a zombie invasion occurs. **Max Brooks suggests a number of ways to prepare for zombies' particular traits, though he underestimates the ability of humans to survive in harsh environments. For example, he writes,** "Unlike its human counterparts, an army of zombies is completely independent of support" (155). **His shortsightedness could have a number of consequences. . . .**

In this version, I know a quotation is coming ("For example"), I know it's going to be written by Max Brooks, and I know I'm being asked to read the quote rather skeptically ("he underestimates"). The sentence with the quotation itself also now begins with a "tag" that eases us into it ("he writes").

Here's an actual example from Alexandra. Notice the way she builds up to the quotation and then explains it:

In the first two paragraphs, the author takes a defensive position when explaining the perception that the public has about scientists by saying that "there is anxiety that scientists lack both wisdom and social responsibility and are so motivated by ambition . . ." and "scientists are repeatedly referred to as 'playing God'" (Wolpert 345). With this last sentence especially, his tone seems to demonstrate how he uses the ethos

appeal to initially set a tone of someone that is tired of being misunderstood.

Alexsandra prepares us for the quotation, quotes, and then analyzes it. I love it. This isn't a hard and fast rule—I've seen it broken by the best of writers, I admit—but it's a wise standard to hold yourself to unless you have a reason not to.

### *Dating Spider-Man*

An annoyance that's closely connected to Armadillo Roadkill is the tendency writers sometimes have of starting or ending paragraphs with quotations. This isn't technically *wrong*, and there are situations when the effect of surprise is what you're going for. But often, a paragraph-beginning or paragraph-closing quotation feels rushed, unexplained, disjointed.

*Dating Spider-Man:*  
starting or ending a paragraph with a quotation

It's like dating Spider-Man. You're walking along with him and he says something remarkably interesting—but then he tilts his head, hearing something far away, and suddenly shoots a web onto the nearest building and *zooms* away through the air. As if you had just read an interesting quotation dangling at the end of a paragraph, you wanted to hear more of his opinion, but it's too late—he's already moved on. Later, he suddenly jumps off a balcony and is by your side again, and he starts talking about something you don't understand. You're confused because he just dropped in and expected you to understand the context of what was on his mind at that moment, much like when readers step into a paragraph that begins with a quotation. Here's an example:

*[End of a preceding paragraph:]* . . . Therefore, the evidence clearly suggests that we should be exceptionally careful about deciding when and where to rest.

“When taking a nap, always rest your elbow on your desk and keep your arm perpendicular to your desktop” (Piven and Borgenicht 98). After all, consider the following scenario. . . .

There's a perfectly good reason why this feels odd—which should feel familiar after reading about the Armadillo Roadkill annoyance above. When you got to the quotation in the second paragraph, you didn't



know what you were supposed to think about it; there was no guidance.

**The Fix** is the same: in the majority of situations, readers appreciate being guided to and led away from a quotation by the writer doing the quoting. Readers get a sense of pleasure from the safe flow of hearing how to read an upcoming quotation, reading it, and then being told one way to interpret it. Prepare, quote, analyze.

I mentioned above that there can be situations where starting a paragraph with a quotation can have a strong effect. Personally, I usually enjoy this most at the beginning of essays or the beginning of sections—like in this example from the very beginning of Jennifer’s essay:

“Nothing is ever simple: Racism and nobility can exist in the same man, hate and love in the same woman, fear and loyalty, compromise and idealism, all the yin-yang dichotomies that make the human species so utterly confounding, yet so utterly fascinating” (Hunter). The hypocrisy and complexity that Stephen Hunter from the *Washington Post* describes is the basis of the movie *Crash* (2004).

Instantly, her quotation hooks me. It doesn’t feel thoughtless, like it would feel if I continued to be whisked to quotations without preparation throughout the essay. But please don’t overdo it; any quotation that opens an essay or section ought to be integrally related to your topic (as is Jennifer’s), not just a cheap gimmick.

*Uncle Barry and His Encyclopedia of Useless Information*

You probably know someone like this: a person (for me, my Uncle Barry) who constantly tries to impress me with how much he knows about just about everything. I might casually bring up something in the news (“Wow, these health care debates are getting really heated, aren’t they?”) and then find myself barraged by all of Uncle Barry’s ideas on government-sponsored health care—which *then* drifts into a story about how his cousin Maxine died in an underfunded hospice center, which had a parking lot that he could have designed better, which reminds him of how good he is at fixing things, just like the garage door at my parents’ house, which probably only needs a little. . . . You get the idea. I might

*Uncle Barry and his  
Encyclopedia of Useless  
Information: using too  
many quotations in a row*

even think to myself, “Wait, I want to know more about that topic, but you’re zooming on before you contextualize your information at all.”

This is something like reading an essay that relies too much on quotations. Readers get the feeling that they’re moving from one quotation to the next without ever quite getting to hear the *real* point of what the author wants to say, never getting any time to form an opinion about the claims. In fact, this often makes it sound as if the author has almost no authority at all. You may have been annoyed by paragraphs like this before:

Addressing this issue, David M. Potter comments, “Whether Seward meant this literally or not, it was in fact a singularly accurate forecast for territorial Kansas” (199). Of course, Potter’s view is contested, even though he claims, “Soon, the Missourians began to perceive the advantages of operating without publicity” (200). Interestingly, “The election was bound to be irregular in any case” (201).

Wait—huh? This author feels like Uncle Barry to me: grabbing right and left for topics (or quotes) in an effort to sound authoritative.

**The Fix** is to return to each quotation and decide why it’s there and then massage it in accordingly. If you just want to use a quote to cite a *fact*, then consider paraphrasing or summarizing the source material (which I find is usually harder than it sounds but is usually worth it for the smoothness my paragraph gains). But if you quoted because you want to draw attention to the source’s particular phrasing, or if you want to respond to something you agree with or disagree with in the source, then consider taking the time to surround *each* quotation with guidance to your readers about what you want them to think about that quote.

In the following passage, I think Jessica demonstrates a balance between source and analysis well. Notice that she only uses a single quotation, even though she surely could have chosen more. But instead, Jessica relies on her instincts and remains the primary voice of authority in the passage:

Robin Toner’s article, “Feminist Pitch by a Democrat named Obama,” was written a week after the video became public and is partially a response to it. She writes, “The Obama campaign is, in some ways, subtly marketing its candidate as a post-feminist man, a generation beyond the gender conflicts

of the boomers.” Subtly is the key word. Obama is a passive character throughout the video, never directly addressing the camera. Rather, he is shown indirectly through speeches, intimate conversations with supporters and candid interaction with family. This creates a sense of intimacy, which in turn creates a feeling of trust.

Toner’s response to the Obama video is like a diving board that Jessica bounces off of before she gets to the really interesting stuff: the pool (her own observations). A bunch of diving boards lined up without a pool (tons of quotes with no analysis) wouldn’t please anyone—except maybe Uncle Barry.

### *Am I in the Right Movie?*

When reading drafts of my writing, this is a common experience: I start to read a sentence that seems interesting

and normal, with everything going just the way I expect it to. But then the unexpected happens: a quotation blurts itself into the sentence in a way that doesn’t fit with the grammar that built up to quotation. It feels like sitting in a movie theater, everything going as expected, when suddenly the opening credits start for a movie I didn’t plan to see. Here are two examples of what I’m talking about. Read them out loud, and you’ll see how suddenly wrong they feel.

*Am I in the Right Movie?  
failing to integrate a quotation into the grammar of the preceding sentence*

1. Therefore, the author warns that a zombie’s vision “are no different than those of a normal human” (Brooks 6).
2. Sheila Anne Barry advises that “Have you ever wondered what it’s like to walk on a tightrope—many feet up in the air?” (50)

In the first example, the quoter’s build-up to the quotation uses a singular subject—a *zombie’s vision*—which, when paired with the quotation, is annoyingly matched with the plural verb *are*. It would be much less jolting to write, “a zombie’s vision *is*,” which makes the subject and verb agree. In the second example, the quoter builds up to the quotation with a third-person, declarative independent clause: *Sheila Anne Barry advises*. But then the quotation switches into second person—you—and unexpectedly asks a question—completely different from the expectation that was built up by the first part of the sentence.

**The Fix** is usually easy: you read your essay out loud to someone else, and if you stumble as you enter a quotation, there's probably something you can adjust in your lead-in sentence to make the two fit together well. Maybe you'll need to choose a different subject to make it fit with the quote's verb (*reader* instead of *readers*; *each* instead of *all*), or maybe you'll have to scrap what you first wrote and start over. On occasion you'll even feel the need to transparently modify the quotation by adding an [s] to one of its verbs, always being certain to use square brackets to show that you adjusted something in the quotation. Maybe you'll even find a way to quote a shorter part of the quotation and squeeze it into the context of a sentence that is mostly your own, a trick that can have a positive effect on readers, who like smooth water slides more than they like bumpy slip-and-slides. Jennifer does this well in the following sentence, for example:

In *Crash*, no character was allowed to "escape his own hypocrisy" (Muller), and the film itself emphasized that the reason there is so much racial tension among strangers is because of the personal issues one cannot deal with alone.

She saw a phrase that she liked in Muller's article, so she found a way to work it in smoothly, without the need for a major break in her thought. Let's put ourselves in Jennifer's shoes for a moment: it's possible that she started drafting this sentence using the plural subject *characters*, writing "In *Crash*, no characters were allowed. . . ." But then, imagine she looked back at the quote from Muller and saw that it said "escape *his* own hypocrisy," which was a clue that she had to change the first part of her sentence to match the singular construction of the quote.

### *I Can't Find the Stupid Link*

You've been in this situation: you're on a website that seems like it might be interesting and you want to learn more about it. But the home page doesn't tell you much, so you look for an "About

Us" or "More Information" or "FAQ" link. But no matter where you search—Top of page? Bottom? Left menu?—you can't find the stupid link. This is usually the fault of web designers, who don't always take the time to test their sites as much as they should with actual users.

*I Can't Find the Stupid Link:  
no connection between the  
first letter of a parenthetical  
citation and the first letter of  
a works cited entry*

The communication failure here is simple: you're used to finding certain kinds of basic information in the places people usually put it. If it's not there, you're annoyed.

Similarly, a reader might see a citation and have a quick internal question about it: *What journal was this published in? When was it published? Is this an article I could find online to skim myself? This author has a sexy last name—I wonder what his first name is?* Just like when you look for a link to more information, this reader has a simple, quick question that he or she expects to answer easily. And the most basic way for readers to answer those questions (when they're reading a work written in APA or MLA style) is (1) to look at the information in the citation, and (2) skim the references or works cited section alphabetically, looking for the first letter in the citation. There's an assumption that the first letter of a citation will be the letter to look for in the list of works cited.

In short, the following may annoy readers who want to quickly learn more about the citation:

[*Essay Text:*] A respected guide on the subject suggests, "If possible, always take the high ground and hold it" (*The Zombie Survival Guide* 135).

[*Works Cited Page:*] Brooks, Max. *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead*. New York: Three Rivers, 2003. Print.

The reader may wonder when *The Zombie Survival Guide* was published and flip back to the works cited page, but the parenthetical citation sends her straight to the Z's in the works cited list (because initial A's and The's are ignored when alphabetizing). However, the complete works cited entry is actually with the B's (where it belongs).

**The Fix** is to make sure that the first word of the works cited entry is the word you use in your in-text citation, every time. If the works cited entry starts with Brooks, use (Brooks) in the essay text.

Citations not including last names may seem to complicate this advice, but they all follow the same basic concept. For instance, you might have:

- **A citation that only lists a title.** For instance, your citation might read ("Gray Wolf General Information"). In this case, the assumption is that the citation can be found under the G

section of the works cited page. Leah cites her paraphrase of a source with no author in the following way, indicating that I should head to the *G*'s if I want to learn more about her source:

Alaska is the only refuge that is left for the wolves in the United States, and once that is gone, they will more than likely become extinct in this country ("Gray Wolf General Information").

- **A citation that only lists a page number.** Maybe the citation simply says (25). That implies that somewhere in the surrounding text, the essay writer must have made it stupendously clear what name or title to look up in the works cited list. This happens a lot, since it's common to introduce a quotation by naming the person it came from, in which case it would be repetitive to name that author again in the citation.
- **A quotation without a citation at all.** This happens when you cite a work that is both A) from a web page that doesn't number the pages or paragraphs and B) is named in the text surrounding the quotation. Readers will assume that the author is named nearby. Stephanie wisely leaves off any citation in the example below, where it's already clear that I should head to the *O*'s on the works cited page to find information about this source, a web page written by Opotow:

To further this point, Opotow notes, "Don't imagine you'll be unscathed by the methods you use. The end may justify the means. . . . But there's a price to pay, and the price does tend to be oneself."

### *I Swear I Did Some Research!*

Let's look in depth at this potentially annoying passage from a hypothetical student paper:

It's possible that a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the universe will open new doors of understanding. If theories from sociology, communication, and philosophy joined with physics, the possibilities would be boundless. This would inspire new research, much like in the

*I Swear I Did Some Research: dropping in a citation without making it clear what information came from that source*

1970s when scientists changed their focus from grand-scale theories of the universe to the small concerns of quantum physics (Hawking 51).

In at least two ways, this is stellar material. First, the author is actually voicing a point of view; she sounds knowledgeable, strong. Second, and more to the point of this chapter, the author includes a citation, showing that she knows that ethical citation standards ask authors to cite paraphrases and summaries—not just quotations.

But on the other hand, which of these three sentences, exactly, came from Hawking's book? Did *Hawking* claim that physics experts should join up with folks in other academic disciplines, or is that the student writer? In other words, at which point does the author's point of view meld into material taken specifically from Hawking?

I recognize that there often aren't clean answers to a question like that. What we read and what we know sometimes meld together so unnoticeably that we don't know which ideas and pieces of information are "ours" and which aren't. Discussing "patchwriting," a term used to describe writing that blends words and phrases from sources with words and phrases we came up with ourselves, scholar Rebecca Moore Howard writes, "When I believe I am not patchwriting, I am simply doing it so expertly that the seams are no longer visible—or I am doing it so unwittingly that I cannot cite my sources" (91). In other words, *all* the moves we make when writing came from somewhere else at some point, whether we realize it or not. Yikes. But remember our main purpose here: to not look annoying when using sources. And most of your instructors aren't going to say, "I understand that I couldn't tell the difference between your ideas and your source's because we quite naturally patchwrite all the time. That's fine with me. Party on!" They're much more likely to imagine that you plopped in a few extra citations as a way of defensively saying, "I swear I did some research! See? Here's a citation right here! Doesn't that prove I worked really hard?"

**The Fix:** Write the sentences preceding the citation with *specific words and phrases that will tell readers what information came from where*. Like this (bolded words are new):

It's possible that a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the universe will open new doors of understanding. **I believe that** if theories from sociology, communication, and

philosophy joined with physics, the possibilities would be boundless. This would inspire new research, much like **the changes Stephen Hawking describes happening** in the 1970s when scientists changed their focus from grand-scale theories of the universe to the small concerns of quantum physics (51).

Perhaps these additions could still use some stylistic editing for wordiness and flow, but the source-related job is done: readers know exactly which claims the essay writer is making and which ones Hawking made in his book. The last sentence and only the last sentence summarizes the ideas Hawking describes on page 51 of his book.

One warning: you'll find that scholars in some disciplines (especially in the sciences and social sciences) use citations in the way I just warned you to avoid. You might see sentences like this one, from page 64 of Glenn Gordon Smith, Ana T. Torres-Ayala, and Allen J. Heindel's article in the *Journal of Distance Education*:

Some researchers have suggested "curriculum" as a key element in the design of web-based courses (Berge, 1998; Driscoll, 1998; Meyen, Tangen, & Lian, 1999; Wiens & Gunter, 1998).

Whoa—that's a lot of citations. Remember how the writer of my earlier example cited Stephen Hawking because she summarized his ideas? Well, a number of essays describing the results of experiments, like this one, use citations with a different purpose, citing previous studies whose general conclusions support the study described in this new paper, like building blocks. It's like saying to your potentially skeptical readers, "Look, you might be wondering if I'm a quack. But I can prove I'm not! See, all these other people published in similar areas! Are you going to pick fights with all of *them* too?" You might have noticed as well that these citations are in APA format, reflecting the standards of the social sciences journal this passage was published in. Well, in this kind of context APA's requirement to cite the year of a study makes a lot of sense too—after all, the older a study, the less likely it is to still be relevant.

### CONCLUSION: USE YOUR TURN SIGNALS

You may have guessed the biggest weakness in an essay like this: what's annoying varies from person to person, with some readers happily skim-



ming past awkward introductions to quotations without a blink, while others see a paragraph-opening quotation as something to complain about on Facebook. All I've given you here—all I *can* give you unless I actually get to know you and your various writing contexts—are the basics that will apply in a number of academic writing contexts. Think of these as signals to your readers about your intentions, much as wise drivers rely on their turn signals to communicate their intentions to other drivers. In some cases when driving, signaling is an almost artistic decision, relying on the gut reaction of the driver to interpret what is best in times when the law doesn't mandate use one way or the other. I hope your writing is full of similar signals. Now if I could only convince the guy driving in front of me to use *his* blinker. . . .

## DISCUSSION

1. Because so many of these guidelines depend on the writer's purpose, publication space, and audience, it can be difficult to know when to follow them strictly and when to bend them. What are some specific writing situations where a writer is justified to bend the standards of how to incorporate sources?
2. Choose one of the annoyances. Then, look through a number of different pieces of writing from different genres and collect two examples of writers who followed your chosen guideline perfectly and two who didn't. For each source you found, jot a sentence or two describing the context of that source and why you think its writer did or did not follow the guideline.
3. Rank the annoyances in order of most annoying to least annoying, pretending that you are a college professor. Now, rank them from the point of view of a newspaper editor, a popular blogger, and another college student. What changes did you make in your rankings?

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# Present Tense


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November 20, 2015

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## “They Call Me Dr. Ore”

 By Ersula J. Ore  Issue 2, Volume 5  10 Comments[Article PDF](#)

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Roderick A. Ferguson said it: “It’s a strange thing to find yourself as a character in the book you just wrote, especially when the book is neither fiction nor autobiography.”<sup>1</sup> The book I had just written wasn’t so much a book as a brief affirming of the connection between lynching, American citizenship, and American civic identity. It’s hard to dispute: America’s tradition of lynching parades the colorline logic of the social contract in ways that force us to question who “the people” really are and the ways in which America’s narrative of progress eclipses the continued and sustained racialization of American civic belonging. I’d sent the manuscript out Spring 2014 with a note to the press that the conclusion wasn’t complete. “There’s something missing. I don’t know what it is but I trust I’ll figure it out by summer’s end,” I told the editor. How was I to know that I was what was missing from the book?

It was the first day of Summer Session A, and I had just wrapped up a three-hour seminar introducing students to the history of rhetoric. Class had ended a few minutes early, so I invited students to ask any lingering questions before we concluded for the evening.

Number 2 Male, 1: “So you have a PhD?”

I chuckle at the first question. “*So you have a PhD?*” is a classic question. College students of color don’t ask me if I’m qualified to teach them; rather, they tell me that they’ve never had a black professor before and ask me what it’s like. White students, on the other hand, never fail to go straight for my credentials. It’s a given. My students, all of whom were white and male, looked confused by my laughter. This tickled me even more. Usually I get Phyllis Wheatley’d just shortly after class introductions. This time, however, my students were polite enough to hold interrogation until the end of class.

Me: “Yes. I have a PhD,” I reply.

Number 2 Male, 2: “Where did you go to graduate school?”

On account of today being the first day of classes and a strategic awareness to be generous now as a provision for checking bullshit later, I answer simply.

Me: “Penn State.”

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Passive aggressive whiteness is the practice of the day, and I find myself learning more and more how to take this bullshit in stride; battling an epistemological system that assumes me always already “out of place” is a constitutive feature of my lived experience and, thus, a chief component of my rhetorical situation. This is my life behind enemy lines, a life constrained by quotient attacks on my humanity, civic personhood, and body.

When I announced that I’d be taking the job at Arizona State, friends and colleagues joked about my need to be careful. “Do you have your papers?” was a question I was regularly teased about, given that Arizona had just passed Senate Bill 1070, a bill that rendered non-whiteness—specifically, brownness—as “reasonable suspicion” to stop, interrogate, and detain drivers. I asserted that I’d be fine. “I pass the brown paper bag test,” I joked. SB 1070 follows suit with Stop and Frisk legislation, except it specifically targets brown bodies, as these are the bodies considered within the broader context of Arizona border politics as “bodies out of place.” While I knew Arizona was dangerous, I nonetheless considered myself “safe.” In my mind I was less likely to be policed because unlike the Mason-Dixon of home, Arizona’s border politics demanded brown bodies, not black ones. Or so I thought.

Class ended and I began my way home. I take the light rail to and from work, and so made my way down College Avenue towards Tempe Transit Center. The road was closed off to oncoming traffic in both directions, signs were everywhere along with makeshift walk-routes to help pedestrians avoid dangerous sections of ongoing construction for the new School of Sustainable Engineering and The Built Environment. I was crossing the street when a car entered the corridor. I figured that the driver hadn’t noticed the “Road Closed” sign that secured the street from automobile traffic. I guess he didn’t see the “Road Closed” sign just behind me either. What happened next was confusing.

I had stopped crossing the street when I saw the car bolting down the corridor. The car stopped just after I did. For a moment we were both idle. I assume that he saw me, given that he stopped, and so I signaled with my hand whether or not it was okay to continue crossing.

Me: *“Can I go, do you want to go?”* I gestured with my hand. He didn’t acknowledge me, but instead sat there looking at me.

I pointed to the “Road Closed” sign behind me thinking that he would see it and buck a U-turn, like all the other drivers who blew past the first “Road Closed” sign before realizing that there was nowhere to go but back the way they came. He still didn’t move. He just sat there looking at me. It wasn’t until I proceeded to continue crossing that he threw on his lights, sped up, and stopped directly in front of me. It was then that I realized it was a police car. Shit made me nervous cause it didn’t really make any sense. The way he waited to rush me, throwing on his high beams, siren, and stopping the front door directly at my waist was unnerving. Folks looking to intimidate and spook are the ones who rush women crossing the street, not cops.

Me: *“What does he want?”* I thought. *“Is there something going on at the light rail station?”*

I was walking in a corridor notorious for rape, so I thought that perhaps the officer, who didn’t identify himself as an officer except to throw on lights and obstruct my way home, might be there to warn me of danger up ahead. But that wasn’t the case.

Ferrin: “Do you know the difference between a street and sidewalk?”\*<sup>2</sup>

I was blasting Kendrick Lamar’s “Good Kid,” but I knew I’d heard him despite “step on his neck as hard as your bullet proof vest, he don’t mind”<sup>3</sup> flowing through my BeatsbyDre.

Me: “What?” I asked confusedly, removing the left earbud and leaning forward.\*

As I leaned forward, I turned my head north. A fair complexioned woman was crossing the street just in front of the northernmost “Road Closed” sign. *If this is a gender-thing, then why didn’t he stop her?*

Ferrin: “Do you know the difference between a street and the sidewalk?”\*

I was taken aback by the question. Of course I knew the difference between a street and the sidewalk, but was that really what he wanted? Just to the right of me were two white males crossing the street. *I know this can’t be about jaywalking. If so, then we’d all be getting snatched up.* I’m not one to jump to conclusions, but it doesn’t take long to assess the situation. It was clear: the darkest body—one African American woman in a black dress, with an orange

briefcase, and a polka-dot lunch pail crossing a campus street at night is, despite the white bodies alongside her, the more visibly seen.

Needless to say, I didn’t make it home that night. Instead I spent over nine hours sleeping on a jail cell floor with a stale roll beneath my head for a pillow because rather than acquiesce to the ways in which white parades as blue, I transgressed. As my father criticized, I was not a “lady in the street.”

Me: “Do you always accost women in the middle of the street like this and speak to them so rudely and with such disrespect as you just did me?”\*

Ferrin: “What?”\*

Me: “Do you always accost women in the middle of the street like this and speak to them so rudely and with such disrespect as you just did me?”\*

Ferrin: “Okay!” he shouted while throwing the car in park.\*

The force with which he shifted into park made the car rock and the uniformed white man in the passenger seat next to Ferrin visible. His colors suggested that he wasn’t a policeman but perhaps a transit officer. Transit officers don’t carry guns. It was at that point that I knew I was in trouble. I had just sassed a white boy in blue in front of his white boy subordinate.

Ferrin exited the car. He was like a tall puffed-up tree, which bothered me because it suggested that he wasn’t there to help me but hurt me. Officers of the law don’t accost women at night, insult them, and then demand their license without ulterior motive. Nothing about the way the encounter began felt right, and nothing about the setup did either—the passenger seemed passive, Ferrin was clearly posturing, and Ferrin consistently misapplied the law, all of which made me question whether or not either of them were actually officers.

Ferrin: “Give me your license!”\*

Me: “Give you my license? For what?”\*

Ferrin: “Give me your license or I’ll arrest you for failure to show ID.”\*

Me: “Give you my license—you haven’t even told me what I’m in violation of!”\*

Ferrin said that I was obstructing a public thoroughfare and that he’d arrest me for failure to show ID, but it didn’t make sense. The logic was all-wrong and I didn’t have a problem with telling him that.<sup>4</sup> When he realized that intimidation wasn’t working, he made one final demand.

Ferrin: “You have one more time to give me your license or I will arrest you for failure to show ID!”\*

Me: “Man, FUCK YOU! I ain’t givin’ you SHIT!!”\*

It was at that point that he grabbed me. The rest was, as too many black folks already know, history.

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My name is Ersula Jawanna Ore, but America calls me Number 1 Female<sup>5</sup>, Strong/Angry Black Woman<sup>6</sup>, “the prickly professor,”<sup>7</sup> black bitch, and “Dr. Whore”<sup>8</sup> because these are imaginings White Democracy needs to sustain itself. If I can be certain about anything, it’s that an intelligent, unapologetically self-respecting black woman is a marketed problem in America, another kind of sacrificial lamb. Stereotyped as hot-tempered, angry, and too smart for their own good, black women like me get spread across cars in the dead of night as a sea of white onlookers picnic at a pub feet away and watch.

Me: “I’m not invisible! I’m not invisible! Don’t stand idly by and let this happen! I’m not invisible. I know you see me!”<sup>9</sup>

I don’t shout “HELP!” because I know that assistance from others is not an option for black women in the street, particularly when those women are tussling with white men in blue uniforms. I shout that I’m not invisible several times but no one moves except to stuff their mouths and drink their drinks as black women like me get choke-held and spun to the ground. My dress goes up when I hit the ground; the other officer knees me in my back as Ferrin



partially dislocates my right shoulder to handcuff me. I scream because I know no one can see me on the ground. I scream because I’ve been taken down. I scream because I have no other means of expelling my rage and awareness that it will be my body along with Trayvon’s and Michael’s that will conclude the manuscript. I must be the one to get away if I want to live to speak another day. And so, rather than continue to fight back, I scream.

---

The months that followed my assault and unlawful arrest were perforated with black bodies in the street, with Ferguson burning, my hometown of Baltimore erupting, and Charleston mourning. I watched as courts nationwide justified the murder of black citizens under the guise of democratic justice and as children nationwide learned that the best way to survive white America was to follow the example of a 5-year-old girl and play dead. I watched because watching was all I could do. Felony charges and national attention have a way of tying your hands, keeping you silent, and making you fester over the hypocrisy of American democracy.

My name is Ersula Jawanna Ore, and I’m the one who told a white man with a badge and a gun to go fuck himself all the while remembering how Jordan Davis’ “Fuck You! Turn that shit up!” got him riddled with bullets; all the while knowing that black bodies enacting self-respect and civic personhood end up hanging from trees, raped, jailed, murdered in jail, and dead in the streets. I am still not whole, still not healed, but I am, unlike so many others, still alive. My name is Ersula Jawanna Ore, and I am here to say the names of those who can’t:

Aiyana Stanley-Jones	Tanisha Anderson	Sandra Bland
Renisha McBride	Michael Brown	Zikarious Flint
Mya Hall	Tamir Rice	Jeremy Lake
Eric Garner	Ramarley Graham	Yvette Smith
Freddie Gray	Tamon Robinson	Walter Scott
John Crawford	Rekia Boyd	Jonathan Ferrell

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6. Morgan, Joan. *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks it Down*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000; Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2000; Beauboefu-Lafontant, Tamara. *Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman: Voice and the Embodiment of a Costly Performance*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2009; Harris-Perry, Melissa. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011; Walker-Barnes, Chanequa. *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014. return
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8. From teaching high school and college, I have regularly “accidentally” been referred to as “Dr. Whore” rather than “Dr. Ore” during times when students feel as though I’ve overstepped my “place.” When checked, the common report is “No, No. You heard me wrong, Dr. Ore. I said, Dr. ORE, not DR. WHORE.” I’ve come to read “Dr. Whore” as

synonymous with "Bitch," which is often forwarded when I refuse to acquiesce to the assumed superiority of white students. [return](#)

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## Portfolio Checklist

Portfolio submission will include the following:

- **Idea generation (reflection):** Discuss your initial approaches to the prompt, how your ideas for your paper came into being, and the processes you used to brainstorm.
- **Drafts:** All drafts, including your final product.
- **Revision process (reflection):** Discuss how workshops, conferences, writing center visits helped you develop, evolve, and refine your ideas into a fully realized piece of writing.
- **Cultivation of voice as an individual (reflection):** Discuss how the process of this unit helped you to articulate your ideas, increase your own self-knowledge or reaffirm your agency, to develop your individual voice as a writer. Consider moments of challenge, when you pushed through tension or took for granted something you thought to be true, in order to produce new knowledge.
- **Cultivation of voice as a community (reflection):** Discuss moments during the process of this unit when you offered your voice to the collective, in order to come to deeper understandings together. Consider moments of challenge, where discussion and disagreement created evolution in your community.

## PORTFOLIO RUBRIC

	Exceeds	Meets	Emerging	Attempted
<b>PROCESS</b>  Engaged in the writing process and gained an awareness of writing options and effects	Student has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Made significant changes (reworked order, changed ideas, moved or reworded sentences)</li> <li>Engaged with peer and instructor responses</li> <li>Played with various technical options and devices</li> </ul>	Student has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed drafts</li> <li>Either made significant changes in each draft or engaged with peer response and teacher response</li> </ul>	Student has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed most drafts</li> <li>Made some changes between drafts</li> <li>Engaged with either peer review or teacher response</li> </ul>	Student has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not completed most drafts or made changes in between</li> <li>Has not engaged with peers or instructor</li> </ul>
<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio is organized into specific section. Work samples are arranged in a sequence to highlight progression over time. Each section contains a clear header. The overall organization of the portfolio is excellent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Portfolio is organized into specific sections. Most sections contain a header. The overall organization of the portfolio to show progress is clear.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio contains work not organized in specific section. Little thought is given to progress over time. The overall organization of the portfolio is confusing and/or incomplete.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A Not enough work.</li> </ul>
<b>CONTENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio contains all assignments requested. Supplemental material included (annotations of work as it relates to the outcomes and reflection).</li> <li>Artifacts give a precise picture of progress and attention to unit details.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio contains most of the assignments for the unit, completed, and most of the supplemental materials (some annotations as it relates to the outcomes and reflection).</li> <li>Artifacts presented give a general picture of progress in the course and attention to unit details.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio contains some completed work and some supplemental material (minimal annotations).</li> <li>Artifacts show an incomplete picture of progress and do not reflect unit details.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio lacks most work. No annotations of content.</li> <li>Artifacts are minimal and do not show a picture of progress or elements of course.</li> </ul>