Using Sources Well: Integrating Evidence in Your Humanities Papers

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What does it mean to “integrate” source material in your papers?

- The word “integrate” often means to **blend** something within a **larger whole**, but it can also indicate the **uniting** of one thing with another, as in the integration of races within a school or society.

- Your research papers will integrate sources in both senses. You will **blend quotations and paraphrased source material** smoothly into your larger argument. And you will develop your own argument by **joining your ideas to those of others**—showing that you can speak to a debate or conversation in a discipline.
What skills will you need to integrate sources in your humanities papers?

You’ll need to show the ability

- to select sources that will enable you to build your own original argument.
- to choose specific parts of those sources to paraphrase or quote to help you develop and support points you wish to make.
- to blend selected quotations smoothly within your own prose.
- to use MLA format correctly as you carefully document each use of source material.
What steps are involved, especially in papers on literary texts?

- This module will take you through three steps for integrating sources effectively.

- We’ll work through these steps with a sample paper on Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. You could open this handout in another window or print it out, since you’ll refer to it often during this module.

- Though this essay is not a research paper and only uses two sources, many skills of integrating sources effectively can be learned from the writer’s strategies.
Step 1: Strengthen your argument

- Paradoxically, the first step in using sources well is to make sure your own argument is clear and strong.

- In humanities papers, quotations often play key roles, but be sure that quotes (others’ ideas or writings) don’t take over.

- Where do readers expect to see your points?

Tip: Though a quote may begin an introduction, don’t let one end it. And avoid using a quote as the first sentence of a body paragraph.
Consider the introductory paragraph in the sample paper by Cara Evans (next slide). Can you see why Cara quotes Benjamin Kidd, a Social Darwinist, at the beginning of her essay?

From the introduction, can you determine what is likely to be Cara’s thesis?

What seems to be the relationship between the thesis and the quote by Kidd? In other words, can you tell how Cara is going to use the Social Darwinist perspective as a lens on Conrad’s novella?

Is the use of the quotation at the beginning effective? Is Cara’s own argument prominent and strong?
Interpreting Darwinism in his 1894 essay “Social Progress and the Rivalry of the Races,” Benjamin Kidd wrote: “The law of life has always been the same from the beginning,—ceaseless and inevitable struggle and competition, ceaseless and inevitable selection and rejection, ceaseless and inevitable progress” (230). While Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* also draws on Darwinism, it takes a critical view of Kidd’s “inevitable progress.” The 1899 novella does not portray European society as the pinnacle of evolution, but instead it depicts a culture crippled by disconnect from its own Darwinian origins. Meanwhile, purportedly “primitive” African society is shown as having a vital energy that the Europeans lack. Evolutionary imagery in *Heart of Darkness* is used ironically to portray not progress, but degeneration.
Though Cara’s introduction begins with a quotation, she immediately suggests that Conrad presents “a critical view” of the source’s position.

Smart strategy: consider using sources that bring a debate into your paper, rather than only those sources that support your views.

How exactly does Cara’s thesis argue with the underlying assumptions of the initial quotation? (See the next slide.)

Note: the essay’s thesis may be the introduction’s last three sentences or its last sentence.
“The law of life has always been the same from the beginning,—ceaseless and inevitable struggle and competition, ceaseless and inevitable selection and rejection, ceaseless and inevitable progress” (230).

In other words, natural (lawful) competition between societies and races leads to the “selection” of the “fittest” as part of “progress.”

Cara’s thesis argues that Conrad challenges this assumption by his portrayal of both Europeans and Africans, so that his novella’s references to evolution are ironic.
This is not to say that it’s always best to find and use sources you want to argue against.

But it’s always a good idea to bring in questions or conflicts or debates suggested by your sources, as well as to use the sources critically, not slavishly. (Yes, even if the source is by a Great Author.)

Note that when Cara moves to analysis of *Heart of Darkness* (in the beginning of the next paragraph), she pauses repeatedly to quote or rephrase Conrad’s wording—thus critically analyzing its implied views and ambiguities.
European alienation from the natural world is described in Darwinian terms. Marlow refers to his compatriots as “you so remote from the night of first ages” (Conrad 36). The “night of first ages” can be taken to mean the first ages of man, the far reaches of evolution before the dawn of human history. Meanwhile “remoteness” connotes not only distance, but also removal. Europeans have become so removed from their own past that the earth itself is alien to them. Marlow’s lament, “We could not understand because we were too far . . .” (35-6), is ambiguous: “too far” could refer to the physical distance between the steamer [the Europeans’ boat] and the apparently incomprehensible shore, but also alludes to evolutionary time. . . .
Notice that the next sentences of this paragraph bring in another quote from the same two-page passage in *Heart of Darkness*. But Cara relates the new quote (“*a prehistoric earth*”) back to the earlier one (the “*night of first ages*”). A concluding sentence then pulls together her paragraph’s points:

The jungle is described as “*a prehistoric earth*” (35), which in a Darwinian sense would represent humankind’s original environment; Europeans are “*too far*” from this point of origins. The use of imagery suggests that some form of evolution has occurred, but in the process Europeans have lost the ability to make sense of the natural world.
Further strategies

- If you study Cara’s four remaining body paragraphs, you can look for other strategies—ways she uses close analysis of Conrad’s text to develop her own argument.

- Consider her carefully crafted topic sentences and concluding sentences in each paragraph. She puts her ideas in these key positions.

- And note how she returns to the initial quote from Kidd. What does she achieve by continuing to refer back to the Social Darwinist position?
Overall, as this paper shows, a strong analytic argument

• uses quotes critically, to bring in and address questions, viewpoints, and even debates;
• uses quotes to back up the writer’s own points, which are placed in high-profile positions (so that the source is secondary, not in the lead);
• uses quotes but then adds commentary—such as explanation, analysis, or critique.

Now let’s turn to the next step, the one that comes after making sure your own argument is strong and in control.
Step 2: Link and blend sources with your own sentences

- Except for epigraphs, effective arguments rarely present quotations that stand on their own. And at university, students are graded on how well they incorporate sources, as opposed to just inserting them as stand-alone sentences.

- So, when you’re using a quote of one or more sentences, provide a lead-in phrase (e.g., Smith claims, “. . .” or According to Jones, “. . .”), or make a statement, followed by a colon and the quote.

See the next slide for examples from the same paper.
Marlow is awed by the jungle but believes its power exists only within the Congo: “We were accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at the thing monstrous and free” (36).

Voyaging upriver, the boat’s occupants become less solidly human than those on shore: “The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us. . . . [W]e glided past like phantoms (35).” (Use three spaced periods after the period to indicate words left out at the end of a sentence; use square brackets for changes in quotations, whether for clarification or grammatical correctness.)

Marlow elaborates, “Yes, it was ugly enough, but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise” (36). (“Elaborates,” like verbs such as “states” or “observes,” is usually followed by a comma before a full-sentence quote.)
But many of the paper’s quotations are not sentences but brief phrases, blending Conrad’s words with Cara’s own points as she analyzes phrases from a full-sentence quote:

Marlow’s remarks on nature also reveal shades of imperialism: “We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance” (35). The natural world evidently is seen as just another domain awaiting European domination. However, seen through the lens of Darwinism, this imperialistic view is naïve. Nature is not an “accursed inheritance” for “the first of men” to claim, but rather the force which shaped “the first of men” and which continues to mould human lives. Disconnect from nature has enabled this hubris that precipitates not “inevitable progress” but downfall.
From this paper, you can see that effective literary analysis papers create variety in the ways they incorporate quotations (and paraphrases), avoiding a monotonous pattern: “Conrad states, ‘. . .’; “Conrad also observes, ‘. . .’”

In addition, avoid long quotations (more than four lines of regular text). But if you do need a four-line (or longer) quote, indent it, following MLA format (see Purdue Online Writing Lab for examples).

Tip: You must earn your use of a long (block) quote: analyze it or comment on its specific points or wording. Otherwise, paraphrase most of it, and mix in some brief quoted phrases.
Step 3: Check each quote for accuracy and correctness (documentation)

- Make sure every quote is precisely accurate, and note any changes you make by using ellipses (... ) or square brackets [ ]. Such accuracy is very important to many university instructors.

- Also, when paraphrasing, be sure not to distort the source or “quote out of context.”

And, of course, avoid plagiarism: put paraphrased sources fully in your own words, reordering the points in a passage, not just replacing words here and there.

(Transform rather than translate the source.)
To make sure you’re using correct MLA format

- see The Writing Centre’s guide to MLA citation: http://ctl.utsc.utoronto.ca/twc/sites/default/files/MLA_format%20handout%281%29.pdf

- find detailed guidelines (with sample papers) at Purdue Online Writing Lab: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/

  Remember, specific questions about how to use sources in your papers are always welcome at The Writing Centre!

And you can help us keep improving our resources by giving us feedback:

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