

Common Mistakes in Citing Sources

Don't cite one source too much.

This makes people suspect your work is derivative—that you're depending on one source for the majority of your own paper.

Exception: If a particular text is your source material, like a paper on "Ghosts in *The Rings of Saturn*," you would understandably quote Sebald many times. This would be okay.

Don't cite irrelevant literature.

Readers will dismiss your paper as digressive. For example, if you are writing about sidewalks, and you go into the history of the modern freeway for three pages.

Don't overcite definitions.

A sentence or a footnote is all that's needed to define terms that may be important to your paper but the general reader doesn't know. Dictionary definitions are usually unimpressive in a paper.

Don't cite the derivative.

If you cite websites or newspapers (watch out for Wikipedia!) as the source of your information, even if it is a really good quote, your paper has less credibility than if you go to the source.

Don't quote too much.

Your job is to summarize and evaluate, not reproduce it. Avoid block quotes in this paper, and in future papers, try to avoid having too many of block quotes, as it makes the reader feel you're not digesting the material, making it your own.

Don't omit citations.

If you use phrases like "research shows that..." or "scholars agree that..." you should always include citations to those scholars publications. You can also indicate this in a footnote.

Adapted from: *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks*, Wendy Laura Becher, Sage Publications, 2009.