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Using Sources in Your Writing

Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- LO1** Choose a topic
- LO2** Do exploratory research
- LO3** Narrow your topic
- LO4** Do focused research
- LO5** Take notes
- LO6** Integrate sources
- LO7** Draft a thesis statement
- LO8** Make a formal outline
- LO9** Draft your paper
- LO10** Evaluate a model literature paper with MLA documentation

When you write a paper about a literary topic, you often do **research**, supplementing your own interpretations with information from other sources. These sources may include works of literature as well as books and journal articles by literary critics (see p. 11). You may get this information from print sources, from electronic databases in the library, or from the Internet. When you write a literary research paper, follow the process discussed in this chapter.

LO1 Choose a Topic

Your instructor may assign a topic or allow you to choose one. If you choose a topic, make sure it is narrow enough for your paper's length, the amount of time you have for writing, and the number of sources your instructor expects you to use.

Daniel Collins, a student in an Introduction to Literature course, was given three weeks to write a four- to six-page research paper on one of the short stories the class had read. Daniel chose to write about Eudora Welty's short story "A Worn Path" because the main character, Phoenix Jackson, interested him. He knew, however, that he would have to narrow his topic before he could begin. In class, Daniel's instructor had asked some provocative questions about the significance of Phoenix Jackson's journey. Daniel thought that this topic might work well because he could explore it in a short paper and could complete the paper within the three-week time limit.

LO2 Do Exploratory Research

To see whether you will be able to find enough material about your topic, you should do some **exploratory research** by

taking a quick survey of your library's resources. Your goal at this stage is to formulate a **research question**, the question that you want your research to answer. This question will help you decide which sources to look for, which to examine first, and which to skip entirely.

You can begin your exploratory research by consulting your library's **online central information system**. This system usually includes the library's **catalog** as well as a number of **bibliographic databases**, such as *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* and *Humanities Index*. Then you can consult Internet sources as well as **general reference works** like encyclopedias and specialized dictionaries and browse your search engine's subject guides to get an overview of your subject.

A quick look showed Daniel that his library's central information system included several books and a number of articles on Eudora Welty. He noted the titles of the most promising sources so he could find them later. After consulting some additional sources on the Internet and thinking more about his topic, Daniel came up with the following research question: What enabled Phoenix Jackson to continue her journey despite the many obstacles she faced?

LO3 Narrow Your Topic

As you survey library and Internet resources, the titles of books and articles should help you to narrow your topic.

Daniel found two critical articles that discussed the significance of Phoenix Jackson's journey, and he hoped they would help him to understand why this character continued her journey despite all the hardships she encountered. However, Daniel knew that he would have to do more than just summarize his sources; he would have to make a point about the journey, one that he could support with examples from the story as well as from his research.

LO4 Do Focused Research

Once you have completed your exploratory research and formulated your research question, you are ready to begin **focused research**—the process of looking in the library and on the Internet for the specific information you need.

LIBRARY RESEARCH Using the Library

The first step is to go back to the library and check out any books that you think will be useful. Then, consult **specialized reference works**—indexes, bibliographies, and specialized encyclopedias, for example—to find relevant articles. If you find print articles, photocopy them (and make sure to copy all the publication information you will need to document these sources).

Your library's **databases** (usually accessed through the library's Web site) will help you find information in periodicals. A **periodical** is a newspaper, magazine, or scholarly journal published at regular intervals. **Periodical indexes** are databases that list articles from a selected group of periodicals. Although you may occasionally

find scholarly articles on the Internet, the easiest (and most reliable) way to access scholarly journals is through the databases to which your college library subscribes. These databases are updated frequently, and the articles they include usually provide current, reliable information.

Choosing the right database for your research is important. Each database has a different focus and lists different magazines, journals. In addition, some indexes include just citations while others contain the full text of articles. Using the wrong database can lead to wasted time and frustration. For example, searching a database that focuses on business will not help you much if you are looking for information on a literary topic. Be sure to ask a reference librarian which database will be most helpful.

Choosing the right database for your research is important. Each database has a different focus and lists different magazines or journals."

FREQUENTLY USED DATABASES

The following databases are useful for literary research.

EBSCOhost	Includes thousands of periodical articles on many subjects
Expanded Academic ASAP	Largely full-text database covering all subjects; thousands of magazines and journals
FirstSearch	Full-text articles in many popular and scholarly periodicals

Evaluating Library Sources

Whenever you find a library source (print or electronic), the time to **evaluate** it—to assess its usefulness and reliability.

EVALUATING LIBRARY SOURCES

- ☐ *Does the source treat your topic in enough detail?* To be of real help, a source should include a section or a chapter on your topic. An article should have your topic as its central subject or at least one of its main subjects.
- ☐ *Is the source current?* Although currency is not as important for research as it is in the sciences, it should still be a consideration. Check the date of publication to see whether the information in a book or article is up to date.
- ☐ *Is the source respected?* A contemporary review of a source can help you make this assessment. You can find reviews in *Book Reviews* available in print and online.
- ☐ *Is the source reliable?* Does the author support his or her opinions? Does the author include documentation? Does the author have a personal agenda to advance? Compare a few statements with a more reliable source—an encyclopedia or a textbook, for example—to see if the author seems to be slanting facts. If you have difficulty making an assessment, ask your instructor or a reference librarian for help.

You can access sources on the Internet in three ways:

1. The most direct way to access an Internet source is to enter a **URL (uniform resource locator)**—into your browser. Once you type in the URL, hit *Enter*, and you will be connected to the Web site you want. Make sure that you type in the URL exactly as it appears. A missed letter or an extra space or punctuation mark will send you to the wrong site—or to no site at all.
2. Another way to access Internet sources is to use **subject guides**—the lists of general subject areas provided by search engines such as *Yahoo!*, *About.com*, and *Google Directory*. Each of these subject areas will lead you to a more specific list until, eventually, you get to the topic you want.
3. A third way to access Internet sources is to enter a **keyword** (or words) into your search engine's search field. The search engine will identify any site in its database on which the keyword (or words) you have typed appears.

INTERNET RESEARCH

Using the Internet

As you can imagine, the Internet has revolutionized the way scholars conduct research, offering instant access to a host of useful sources. Keep in mind, however, that the Internet does not give you access to the large number of high-quality print and electronic sources that you find in your college library.

Some search engines are more user friendly than others, some allow for more sophisticated searching, and some are more comprehensive. As you try out various search engines, you will eventually settle on one that you will turn to when you need to find information.

SOME GENERAL-PURPOSE SEARCH ENGINES

AllTheWeb	An excellent, comprehensive search engine that enables you to search for news stories, pictures, video, and audio. Many users think it is as good as <i>Google</i> .
AltaVista	A good, precise search engine for focused searches.
Excite	Searches more than 250 million Web sites.
Google	Considered by many to be the best search engine available. Accesses a large database that enables you to search for Web sites, images, discussion groups, and news stories.
Google Scholar	Enables you to search a broad range of scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed papers, books, abstracts, and technical reports as well as scholarly articles.
Yahoo!	A search tool that allows you to use either subject headings or keywords. Searches its own indexes as well as the Web.
Dogpile	A metasearch engine that searches several search engines simultaneously.

In addition to the general-purpose search engines listed above, you can use **specialized search engines**—search sites that are especially useful during focused research when you are looking for in-depth information about a specific topic.

SOME SPECIALIZED SEARCH ENGINES

Librarians' Index	A high-quality, reliable site designed for librarians
Litengine.com	A highly selective search engine for information about authors
Thinkers.net	Discussions on literature and information about the publishing world
Voice of the Shuttle	Reliable in-depth research in the humanities

Evaluating Web Sites

Anyone can operate a Web site and thereby publish anything. For this reason, it is important to determine the quality of a Web site before you use it as a source. Asking the questions below will help you evaluate Web sites and the information they contain.

EVALUATING WEB SITES

- ☐ *How credible is the person or organization responsible for the site? Does the site list an author? Can you determine the author's expertise?*
- ☐ *How accurate is the information on the Web site? Is it free of factual and grammatical errors? Can you verify the information by checking other sources?*
- ☐ *How balanced does the information on the Web site seem? Does a business, political organization, or special interest group sponsor the site? Does the site express only one viewpoint?*
- ☐ *How comprehensive is the Web site? Does the site provide in-depth coverage, or is the information largely common knowledge?*
- ☐ *How well maintained is the Web site? Has it been active for a long period of time? Has the site been updated recently?*

Daniel Collins, the student writing about Phoenix Jackson's journey, was lucky enough to find everything he needed in his college library. He found two print articles about the Welty story, and he found two more articles in the *Humanities Index* database. Finally, a search of his library's online central information system revealed that among the library's holdings was a DVD dramatization of "A Worn Path" that included an interview with the author.

LO5 Take Notes

Once you have located your sources, you should record information that you think will be useful. There is no single correct way to take notes. Some writers store information in a computer file; others keep their notes on index cards. Whatever system you use, be sure to record the author's full name as well as *complete* publication information. You will need this information later on to compile your works-cited list (see p. 76).

When you take notes from a source, you have three options: you can *paraphrase*, *summarize*, or *quote*.

When you **paraphrase**, you put the author's main points into your own words, keeping the emphasis of the original.

You paraphrase when you want to make a difficult or complex discussion accessible to readers so that you can comment on it or use it to support your own points. Here is a passage from a critical article, followed by Daniel's paraphrase.

Original

The assumption that the grandson is dead helps explain Phoenix Jackson's stoical behavior in the doctor's office. She displays a "ceremonial stiffness" as she sits "bolt upright" staring "straight ahead, her face solemn and withdrawn into rigidity." This passiveness suggests her psychological dilemma—she cannot explain why she made the journey. Her attempt to blame the lapse of memory on her illiteracy is unconvincing. Her lack of education is hardly an excuse for forgetting her grandson, but it goes a long way toward explaining her inability to articulate her subconscious motives for her journey. (Bartel, Roland. "Life and Death in Eudora Welty's 'A Worn Path.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 14.1 (1977): 288-90. Print.)

Paraphrase

As Roland Bartel points out in "Life and Death in Eudora Welty's 'A Worn Path,'" Phoenix Jackson's "stoical behavior" at the doctor's office makes sense if her grandson is actually dead. Although she says that her forgetfulness is due to her lack of education, Bartel does not accept this excuse. According to him, the fact that Phoenix is uneducated cannot fully explain her forgetting about her grandson—although it might explain why she cannot communicate her reasons for her trip (289).

When you write a **summary**, you also put an author's ideas into your own words, but you convey just the main idea of a passage. For this reason, a summary is always much shorter than the original. Here is Daniel's summary of the passage from Bartel's article.

Summary

As Roland Bartel points out in "Life and Death in Eudora Welty's 'A Worn Path,'" Phoenix Jackson's actions make sense if we assume that her grandson is dead and that she does not have the skill to explain her motive (289).

When you **quote**, you reproduce a passage exactly, word for word and punctuation mark for punctuation mark, enclosing the entire passage in quotation marks. Because a large number of quotations will distract readers, use a quotation only when you think that the author's words will add something—memorable wording, for example—to your paper.

LO6 Integrate Sources

To integrate a paraphrase, summary, or quotation smoothly into your paper, use a phrase that introduces your source and its author—*Bartel points out*, *according to Bartel*, *Bartel claims*, or *Bartel says*, for example. You can place this identifying phrase at various points in a sentence.

According to Roland Bartel, "The assumption that the grandson is dead helps explain Phoenix Jackson's stoical behavior in the doctor's office" (289).

"The assumption that the grandson is dead helps explain Phoenix Jackson's stoical behavior in the doctor's office," observes Roland Bartel in his article "Life and Death in Eudora Welty's 'A Worn Path'" (289).

"The assumption that the grandson is dead," notes the literary critic Roland Bartel, "helps explain Phoenix Jackson's stoical behavior in the doctor's office" (289).

EXERCISE: INTEGRATING QUOTATIONS

For each of the quotations below, write three sentences: one that integrates the complete

sentence, one that integrates part of the quotation into your sentence, and one that quotes just a distinctive word or phrase.

Example

- **Original quotation:** “But it seems to me that once you begin a gesture it’s fatal not to go through with it” (Updike 134).
- **Sentence integrating complete quotation:** Readers understand Sammy’s determination to stand up to Lengel when he says, “But it seems to me that once you begin a gesture it’s fatal not to go through with it” (Updike 134).
- **Sentence integrating part of the quotation:** Sammy has mixed feelings about quitting his job but feels that “once you begin a gesture it’s fatal not to go through with it” (Updike 134).
- **Sentence quoting one distinctive word:** Sammy considers changing his mind but decides that to do so would be “fatal” (Updike 134).

Quotations

1. “We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will” (Faulkner 123).
2. “And so the house came to be haunted by the unspoken phrase: *There must be more money! There must be more money!*” (Lawrence 298).
3. “That moment she was mine, mine, fair” (Browning, line 36)
4. “But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep / and miles to go before I sleep” (Frost, lines 14–16).
5. “We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things—it’s just a different kind of the same thing” (Glaspell 561).

Note Remember to document all paraphrases, summaries, and quotations that you use in your essays. (See Chapter 7, Documenting Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism.)

LO7 Draft a Thesis Statement

After you have taken notes, review the information you have gathered, and use it to help you draft a **thesis statement**—a single sentence that states the main idea of your paper. You will support this thesis with a combination of your own ideas and the ideas you have drawn from your research.

After reviewing his notes, Daniel developed the following thesis statement about Eudora Welty’s “A Worn Path.”

Thesis Statement: What is most important in the story is the spiritual and emotional strength of Phoenix Jackson and how this strength enables her to continue her journey.

As you draft and revise your paper, your thesis statement will probably change. At this point in the writing process, however, it gives your ideas focus and enables you to organize them into an outline.

LO8 Make a Formal Outline

Once you have drafted a thesis statement, you can construct a formal outline from your notes. Begin by writing your thesis statement at the top of the page. Then, review your notes, and arrange them in the order in which you plan to use them. As you construct your outline, group these points under appropriate headings.

When it is completed, your outline will show you how much support you have for each of your points, and it will guide you as you write a draft of your paper. Your outline, which covers the body paragraphs of your essay, can be a **sentence outline**, in which each idea is expressed as a sentence, or a **topic outline**, in which each idea is expressed in a word or a short phrase.

After reviewing his notes, Daniel constructed the following topic outline. Notice that he uses roman numerals for first-level headings, capital letters for second-level headings, and arabic numerals for third-level headings. Notice too that all points in the outline are expressed in parallel terms.

Thesis Statement: What is most important in the story is the spiritual and emotional strength of Phoenix Jackson and how this strength enables her to continue her journey.

- I. Critical interpretations of “A Worn Path”
 - A. Heroic act of sacrifice
 - B. Journey of life
 - C. Religious pilgrimage
- II. Focus on journey
 - A. Jackson and her grandson
 - B. Nurse’s question
 - C. Jackson’s reply

- III. Jackson's character
 - A. Interaction between Jackson's character and journey
 - 1. Significance of Jackson's first name
 - 2. Jackson as a complex character
 - B. Jackson's physical problems
 - 1. Failing eyesight
 - 2. Difficulty walking
- IV. Jackson's spiritual strength
 - A. Belief in God
 - B. Child of nature
- V. Jackson's emotional strength
 - A. Love for grandson
 - B. Fearlessness and selflessness
 - C. Determination

Your paper's introduction will usually be a single paragraph. In addition to identifying the work (or works) you are writing about and stating your thesis, the introduction to a literary research paper may present an overview of your topic or necessary background information.

"Remember, the purpose of your first draft is to get ideas down on paper so that you can react to them. You should expect to revise, possibly writing several drafts."

The **body** of your paper supports your thesis statement, with each of your paragraphs developing a single point. Support your points with examples from the literary work you are discussing or with summaries, paraphrases, and quotations from your sources. In addition, be sure to include your own observations and inferences.

Your paper's **conclusion**, usually a single paragraph (but sometimes more), restates your main points and reinforces your thesis statement.

Remember, the purpose of your first draft is to get ideas down on paper so that you can react to them. You should expect to revise, possibly writing several drafts.

The final draft of Daniel Collins's paper on Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path" appears on the pages that follow.

LO9 Draft Your Paper

Once you have constructed your outline, you can draft your paper. Follow your outline as you write, using your notes as the need arises.

LO10 Evaluate a Model Literature Paper with MLA Documentation

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Daniel Collins
Professor Smith
English 201
11 January 2011

And Again She Makes the Journey: Character and Act in Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path"

Since it was published in 1940, Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path," the tale of an elderly black woman, Phoenix Jackson, traveling to the city to obtain medicine for her sick grandson, has been the subject of much critical interpretation. Critics have wondered about the meaning of the many death and rebirth symbols, including the scarecrow, which the old woman believes is a ghost; the buzzard who watches her travel; the skeleton-like branches that reach out to slow her; and her first name, Phoenix. Various critics have concluded that "A Worn Path" is either a "heroic act of sacrifice."

“a parable for the journey of life,” or “a religious pilgrimage” (Piwinski 40). It is certainly true that Phoenix Jackson’s journey has symbolic significance. However, what is most important in the story is the spiritual and emotional strength of Phoenix Jackson and how this strength enables her to continue her journey.

Eudora Welty discusses Phoenix Jackson in a DVD interview with Beth Henley. Welty points out that Jackson’s first name refers to a mythical bird that dies and is reborn every five hundred years. She explains, however, that despite her symbolic name, Phoenix Jackson is more than a symbol: she is a complex character with human frailties and emotions.

Phoenix Jackson has a number of physical problems that make it difficult for her to perform daily tasks. Because of her age, she has failing eyesight, which distorts her perception of the objects she encounters during her journey. For example, Phoenix mistakes a patch of thorns for “a pretty little *green* bush” (286), and she believes a scarecrow is the ghost of a man. She also has difficulty walking, so she must use a cane; at one point, she is unable to bend and tie her own shoes. Because of these physical problems, readers might expect her to fail in her attempt to reach town; as the narrator points out, the journey is long and difficult. So what gives Phoenix Jackson the energy and endurance for the journey?

Although Phoenix Jackson’s body is weak, she has great spiritual and emotional strength. According to James Saunders, her oneness with nature helps her overcome the challenges that she encounters. Because Phoenix Jackson is “a child of nature,” her impaired vision, although it slows her journey, does not stop it. As Saunders explains, “mere human vision would not have been sufficient for the journey” (67). Instead, Phoenix Jackson relies on her spiritual connection with nature; thus, she warns various animals to “Keep out from under these feet . . .” (285). Her spiritual strength also comes from her belief in God—a quality seen when she refers to God watching her steal the hunter’s nickel.

Phoenix Jackson’s spiritual strength is matched by her emotional strength. Her love for her grandson compels her to endure any difficulty and to defy any danger. Therefore, throughout her journey, she demonstrates fearlessness and selflessness. For example, when the hunter threatens her with his gun, she tells him that she has faced worse dangers. And, despite her need for new shoes, she buys a paper windmill for her grandson instead.

In her interview with Beth Henley, Eudora Welty explains how she created Phoenix Jackson—outwardly frail and inwardly strong. Welty tells how she noticed an “old lady” slowly making her way across a “silent horizon,”¹ driven by an overwhelming need to reach her destination; as Welty says, “she had a purpose.” Welty created Phoenix Jackson in the image of this determined woman. In order to emphasize the character’s strength, Welty had her make the journey to Natchez to get medication for her grandson.

Because the act had to be performed repeatedly, the journey became a ritual that had to be completed at all costs. Thus, as Welty explains in the interview, the act of making the journey—not the journey itself—is the most important element in the story.

In order to emphasize the importance of the journey, Welty gives little information about the daily life of the boy and his grandmother or about the illness for which the boy

being treated. Regardless of the boy's condition—or even whether he is alive or dead—Jackson must complete her journey. The nurse's statement—"The doctor said as long as you came to get it [the medicine], you could have it" (289)—reinforces the ritualistic nature of Jackson's journey, a journey that Bartel suggests is a "subconscious" act (289). Thus, Phoenix Jackson cannot answer the nurse's questions because she does not consciously know what forces her to make the journey. Nevertheless, next Saturday, Phoenix Jackson will again walk, and "will continue to do so, regardless of the difficulties facing her, along the worn path that leads through the wilderness of the Natchez Trace, cheerfully performing her labor of love" (Howard 84).

Clearly, the interaction of character (Phoenix Jackson) and act (the ritual journey in search of medication) is the most important element of Welty's story. By describing Phoenix Jackson's difficult encounters during her ritual journey to town, Welty emphasizes how spiritual and emotional strength can overcome physical frailty and how determination and fearlessness can overcome any danger (Bethea 37). These moral messages become clear by the time Jackson reaches the doctor's office. The image of the elderly woman determinedly walking across the horizon, the image that prompted Welty to write the story, remains in the minds of readers.

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Note

1. Unlike the written version of "A Worn Path," the DVD version of the short story ends not at the doctor's office but with a vision similar to the one that inspired Welty to write the story—the elderly African-American woman silently walking along the horizon at dusk.

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CHAPTER 6

IN REVIEW

Using Sources in Your Writing



CHECKLIST

USING SOURCES

- ☐ Acknowledge all material from sources, including the literary work or works under discussion, using the documentation style of the Modern Language Association (MLA).
- ☐ Combine paraphrases, summaries, and quotations with your own interpretations, weaving quotations smoothly into your paper. Introduce the words or ideas of others with a phrase that identifies their source (**According to Richard Wright's biographer, . . .**), and end with appropriate parenthetical documentation.
- ☐ Use quotations *only* when something vital would be lost if you did not reproduce the author's exact words.
- ☐ Integrate short quotations (four lines or fewer of prose or three lines or fewer of poetry) smoothly into your paper. Use a slash (/) with one space on either side to separate lines of poetry. Be sure to enclose quotations in quotation marks.
- ☐ Set off quotations of more than four lines of prose or more than three lines of poetry by indenting one inch from the left-hand margin. Double-space, and do not use quotation marks. If you are quoting just one paragraph, do not indent the first line.
- ☐ Use ellipses—three spaced periods—to indicate that you have omitted material within a quotation (but never use ellipses at the beginning of a quoted passage).
- ☐ Use brackets to indicate that you have added words to a quotation: **As Earl notes, "[Willie] is a modern-day Everyman" (201).** Use brackets to alter a quotation so that it fits grammatically into your sentence: **Wilson says that Miller "offer[s] audiences a dark view of the present" (74).**
- ☐ Place commas and periods *inside* quotation marks: **According to Robert Coles, the child could "make others smile."**
- ☐ Place punctuation marks other than commas and periods *outside* quotation marks: **What does Frost mean when he says, "a poem must ride on its own melting"? If the punctuation mark is part of the quoted material, place it inside the quotation marks: In "Mending Wall," Frost asks, "Why do they make good neighbors?"**
- ☐ When citing part of a short story or novel, supply the page number (143). For a poem, supply line numbers (3-5), including the word *line* or *lines* just in the first reference. For a play, supply act, scene, and line numbers (2.2.17-22).
- ☐ Include a works-cited list (unless your instructor tells you not to).