

## INCORPORATING SOURCES

There are multiple ways to incorporate your sources in your research essay. Some sources you will make a large part of your argument—they are your primary interlocutors and contenders, or your theoretical lens, or the method you are replicating—and some will become smaller parts: factual or background information or contextualizing or framing criticism. At times you will only cite terms, readings or concepts from a source, and at other times you will be examining a source point-by-point or evaluating the large-scale ideas it presents. Sometimes a single source will even function in multiple ways.

The key point here is twofold: firstly, that you will not use your sources in the same ways or to equal extents, and secondly, that depending on the needs of your argument you will end up citing some of your sources much more than others and discussing them at length, while you may only cite and discuss comparatively small components of other sources.

### Size and Location of Sources

Big (found throughout your essay; may even have dedicated paragraphs or sections)

- Primary lens or theory
- Primary interlocutors
- Methodological framework

Medium (referenced at the paragraph and sentence level)

- Crucial Background or Context
- Additional, related critical positions
- Small points of opposition, agreement or reference

Small (found at clause and sentence level, and in footnotes<sup>1</sup>)

- Terms and definitions
- Summaries and histories
- Explanatory material that does not directly relate to argument
- Minor background, factual, and/or informational material
- Other possible directions for your topic

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<sup>1</sup> Footnotes are a great location to put small or side information that relates to your topic but that might detract from the main argument of your paper.

## Functions of Sources

*Motivating – Contextualizing – Supporting – Opposing – Establishing – Speculating – Lensing*

No matter their size or location in your paper, each of your sources may have a different function or relationship to your own argument. You might use one source just to contextualize your argument in a historical time or a cultural concept, for example, or to give additional support of a particular idea. Sometimes you might use one source to motivate your argument; often these sources will be used at the beginning of a paper as they are used to start a debate, ask a question, or pose a problem. Some sources may be used in multiple ways; for instance, you might use one critic as support for one idea but a counterargument for another.

Credit: Paige Eggebrecht, Brandeis University Writing Center, 2020.

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