You need not read everything you find closely. Instead, scan potential sources to see how well each one satisfies the following criteria:

- *Is the source relevant?* Keep your question in mind as you research, and use it to help you focus on sources that are directly related to your subject. If you are writing about the treatment of animals in the circus, for instance, your readers are not going to find information from an article on zoos convincing. With so many sources available, you can afford to be selective.
- *Are you looking at a primary or a secondary source?* A primary source is an original document written by a creator or an eyewitness—for instance, a personal essay, a short story, a lab report, a speech delivered at an event. A secondary source is a writer's interpretation of a primary source or sources—a movie review, a summary of recent scientific discoveries, a historian's explanation of an event. While secondary sources can be very helpful in obtaining factual data and general overviews of a subject, primary sources usually provide more valuable evidence for analysis.
- *How current is the information?* In most cases, the more recently your source was published or updated, the better. Know when a document was created, and consider how its age affects its usefulness for your purposes.
- *What is the author's purpose?* Consider, for instance, whether a source is meant to provide information, argue a point, support a political view, or sell a product. In books, the preface and table of contents will often provide clues to the author's intentions. When you're looking at a periodical or a Web site, scanning the titles of nearby articles or checking the "About" page can give you a sense of the purpose of the material.
- *Is the author reliable?* Determine not only who wrote the material but also the writer's qualifications for writing on the subject, and look for any potential biases—especially in the case of online sources. Be wary of writers who use inflammatory or sensationalist language, and notice how the author uses evidence: reliable writers provide detailed support for their ideas, distinguish between facts and opinions, acknowledge opposing viewpoints, and cite their sources.

Once you've determined that a source is worth using, the checklist for critical reading on page 8 can help you to examine it more closely.

Synthesizing Source Material

When you bring information and ideas from outside sources into your writing, your goal is to develop and support an argument of your own making, not to report on what others have written. Always strive to maintain your voice. It can be tempting to string together facts and quotations from your sources and to think that they speak for themselves—or for you—but your own argument should always be the main event. Aim instead for **synthesis**, weaving the elements into a new whole: gather related information and ideas from your sources, and summarize, paraphrase, and quote them to support your thesis.

Summarizing

A **summary** is a condensed statement, *in your own words*, of the main meaning of a work. Summaries omit supporting details and examples to focus on the original author's thesis. You can find short summaries of essays throughout this book in the sections "A Note on Thematic Connections," which appear in Chapters 5–14. For example:

> Langston Hughes pinpoints the moment during a church revival when he lost his faith (76–78).
>
> Perri Klass's essay grapples with why doctors use peculiar and often cruel jargon and contemplates how it affects them (139–42).

Notice that each summary names the author of the work being summarized and provides page numbers; it also refrains from using any of the original authors' language.

Summarizing is one of the most effective ways to bring the ideas of others into your writing without losing your voice or bogging down your essay with unnecessary details. Depending on the length of the original work and your reasons for using it, your summary might be a single sentence or a paragraph; keep it as short as possible—generally no longer than 10% of the original. If you're responding to a short essay, for example, a handful of sentences will usually be enough to express its meaning.

Paraphrasing

A **paraphrase** is a restatement, again *in your own words*, of a short passage from another writer's work. While summarizing makes it possible to explain

someone else's main idea without repeating specifics, paraphrasing lets you incorporate important details that support your own main idea.

A paraphrase is about the same length as the original, but it does not use any of the other writer's unique words, phrasings, or sentence structures. Simply replacing a few words with synonyms won't suffice; in fact, that shortcut counts as plagiarism (see pp. 393–94). If you cannot avoid using some of the writer's language, put it in quotation marks:

> ORIGINAL PASSAGE "Poverty is defined, in my system, by people not being able to cover the basic necessities in their lives. Indispensable medical care, nutrition, a place to live: all these essentials, for poor people, are often and classically beyond reach. If a poor person needs $10 a day to make ends meet, often he or she only makes eight and a half."
>
> —Walter Mosley, "Show Me the Money," p. 6.
>
> PARAPHRASE As Walter Mosley sees it, poverty is a matter of inadequate resources. The poor have difficulty obtaining adequate health care, food, and shelter—things most of us take for granted—not because they have no income at all, but because the money they earn is not enough to cover these basic expenses (6).
>
> ORIGINAL PASSAGE "Wealth, in my definition, is when money is no longer an issue or a question. Wealthy people don't know how much money they have or how much they make. Their worth is gauged in property, natural resources, and power, in doors they can go through and the way the law works."
>
> —Walter Mosley, "Show Me the Money," p. 6.
>
> PARAPHRASE Wealth, in contrast, is defined by freedom. The rich don't have to worry about finances; indeed, their "property, natural resources, and power" confer social and legal privileges far more significant than freely available cash (Mosley 6).

Notice here, too, that a paraphrase identifies the original source and provides a page number. Even if the words are your own, the ideas are someone else's, and so they must be credited.

Quoting

Sometimes a writer's or speaker's exact words will be so well phrased or so important to your own meaning that you will want to quote them. When you are responding to or analyzing passages in a written work, such as an essay or a novel, direct **quotations** will be essential evidence as you develop your points. Even when you are borrowing ideas from other writers, however, quoting can be useful if the author's original wording makes a strong impression that you want to share with your readers.

Be sparing in your use of quotations. Limit yourself to those lines you're analyzing or responding to directly and perhaps a handful of choice passages that would lose their punch or meaning if you paraphrased them. Quoting others too often will make you vanish as a writer, leaving your readers wondering what *you* have to say and why they should care.

When you do use a quotation, be careful to copy the original words and punctuation exactly and to identify clearly the boundaries and source of the quotation:

- *Put quotation marks around all quoted material shorter than four typed lines.*
- *Use block quotations for quoted passages longer than four typed lines.* Introduce the quotation with a complete sentence followed by a colon, start the quotation on a new line, and indent the whole passage ten spaces or one inch. Don't use quotation marks; the indention shows that the material is quoted.
- *Cite the source of the quotation, giving a page number as well as the author's name* (see pp. 395–98). For short quotations, place a parenthetical citation after the final quotation mark and before the period. For block quotations, place a parenthetical citation after the final period.

You can make changes in quotations so that they fit the flow of your own sentences—say, by deleting a word or sentence that is not relevant to your purpose or by inserting a word or punctuation mark to clarify meaning. However, such changes must be obvious.

- Use an *ellipsis mark*, or three spaced periods (. . .), to show a deletion:

> Stewart and Elizabeth Ewen have suggested that "for hardworking, ill-housed immigrants, . . . clothing offered one of the few avenues by which people could assume a sense of belonging" (156).

- Use *brackets* ([ ]) around any change or addition you make:

> Most fashion historians echo Thorstein Veblen's assertion that "members of each [social] stratum accept as their ideal of decency the scheme of life in vogue in the next higher stratum" (84).

For examples of the use and formatting of quotations, see the sample research paper by Jarrod Ballo (p. 407).

Integrating

When you incorporate material from outside sources, make a point to introduce every summary, paraphrase, or quotation and to specify why it's relevant to your thesis. At the same time, make it clear where your thoughts end and someone else's thoughts begin. Three techniques are especially helpful in giving your readers the necessary guidance.

- *Use signal phrases to introduce summaries, paraphrases, and quotations.* A signal phrase names the author of the borrowed material and thus provides a transition between your idea and someone else's. If the information is relevant, you might also explain why the author is an authoritative source or name the article or book you're referring to. Here are some examples of signal phrases:

  As neurologist Oliver Sacks points out in his book *The Mind's Eye*, . . .

  US Census Bureau data reveal . . .

  Not everyone agrees. Pat Mora, for example, insists that . . .

  In his trial summation, Darrow argued that nobody has control over his or her fate: . . .

  Note that a signal phrase followed by a colon must be a complete sentence (see p. 43). Be careful, as well, to craft each signal phrase to reflect your reasons for including a source. Using the same phrase over and over (such as "According to ________") will frustrate your readers.

- *Generally, mark the end of borrowed material with a parenthetical citation identifying at least the page number of your source* (see pp. 395–98). In most cases, the citation is required—an exception would be a source lacking page or other reference numbers—and it makes clear that you've finished with the source and are returning to your own argument.
- *Follow up with a brief explanation of how the material supports your point.* To show that the borrowed material backs up your ideas, comment afterward on what it contributes to your essay. You might, for example, comment on the meaning of the borrowed material, dispute it, or summarize it in the context of a new idea. Such follow-ups are especially necessary after block quotations.

For examples of effective integration of source materials, see Jarrod Ballo's sample researched essay (p. 407).

Avoiding Plagiarism

Claiming credit for writing that you didn't compose yourself is considered **plagiarism**, a form of academic dishonesty that can carry serious consequences. Buying an essay online and submitting it as your own, copying a friend's essay and submitting it as your own, or copying just a sentence from a source and including it as your own—these are the most obvious forms of plagiarism. But plagiarism is often unintentional, caused not by deliberate cheating but by misunderstanding or sloppiness. Be aware of the rules and responsibilities that come with using the work of others in your writing.

- *Take careful notes.* No matter what your system for researching—formal note cards, dedicated notebooks, photocopies, electronic files—thorough and accurate records are essential. It's all too easy to forget, when you return to your notes, which words are your own and which ones are borrowed. If you copy down the exact words of a source, enclose them in quotation marks and make note of the source. If you paraphrase or summarize, make a note that the language is your own, and double-check that you haven't picked up any of the original phrasing. Always record full source information for any material you find, using the models on pages 398–405.
- *Use electronic sources with care.* Just because something appears on the Internet doesn't mean you're free to use it however you wish. Any language or idea you find, regardless of where you find it, must be credited to its source. Resist the urge to cut and paste snippets from online sources directly into your working draft: later on you won't be able to distinguish the borrowed text from your own words. Print electronic documents for your records, or save them as clearly labeled individual files.
- *Know the definition of* common knowledge. *Common knowledge* is information that is so widely known or broadly accepted that it can't be traced to a particular writer. Facts that you can find in multiple sources—the date of a historic event, the population of a major city—do not need to be credited as long as you state them in your own words. In contrast, original material that can be traced to a particular person—the lyrics to a song, an article on the Web—must be cited even if it has been distributed widely. Note that even if a piece of information is common knowledge, the wording of that information is not: put it in your own words.