Evaluating and using sources can be a difficult task. How do you pick and choose? How do you take information from your sources and create your own original writing? Here are some tips to help you make the most of your sources:

**On Choosing Sources:**

*Think about relevance.*
Is the source particularly relevant to your topic? Will it be useful in supporting your argument? To save time later, do some pre-reading/skimming of sources to assess their *usefulness*.

*Evaluate the author.*
Is the author qualified to speak on the subject? Does the author have a particular bias? Pay attention to whether the author is supporting or challenging your own ideas.

*Evaluate the reputability of the source.*
Consider if the publication has a good reputation in its field, or if it is unknown. It is smart to research the source; that way you can be sure you are using one that is an authority. Consider the date of the publication/ website —is it recent? If it is a web page, treat it in the same way as you would any other publication and research its reputation.

*Consider the audience.*
Is the author writing to a particular audience? Does the author assume a level of knowledge from his audience? If you need a *scholarly source*, this information is important to know.

*Consider the arguments and evidence.*
What are the points the author is trying to make and what *evidence* is given to support them? Are claims supported by credible evidence? Play “lawyer” and consider the source and kind of this evidence before you accept the author'

**On Using Sources:**

*Choose short quotations.*
Limit the use of your quotations. Quotations serve the paper well when the author being quoted says it best! Always try to rephrase in your own words or paraphrase to minimize usage.

*Summarize and paraphrase correctly.*
If you are summarizing or paraphrasing, make sure that the author’s ideas are written in your own words. Do not try to *mix the author’s wording* with your own! Capture the main points and put them into your own words and sentence structures.

*Avoid plagiarism.*
Plagiarism occurs when you use someone else’s words or ideas as your own without giving any credit to the true author. Plagiarism can ruin your credibility as a writer and can result in serious consequences.

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