

# Using Sources Effectively

When utilizing a source in any form--whether as a quote, paraphrase, or summary--first determine its intended function for your assignment. Then ask yourself how effectively the source fulfills that purpose:

## If the purpose is to provide background information on your topic:

- ❖ How necessary is this background information?
  - Can your reader fully understand your argument without the information?
- ❖ How exactly does this information relate to your thesis?
- ❖ Why are you providing context? What parts of your argument does it clarify?

## If the purpose is to elaborate on, strengthen, or support your thesis argument:

- ❖ How does this source relate to your subject? How is it relevant?
- ❖ How does it support/further your own argument?
  - Compare your own thesis stance to the argument the author is making. How does the author's stance affect your own? How does their conclusion support or counter your own?
- ❖ How does this source relate to the previous/next source?
  - How is it different or the same? What does it add that can't be accomplished with another source?

## If the purpose is to address a counter-argument:

- ❖ What part of your argument is it trying to counter?
  - Do you have the evidence to refute the counter-argument?
- ❖ How does refuting that counter-argument strengthen your own argument?
- ❖ Would failing to address the counter-argument weaken your argument?
  - Or, would the premise of your argument fail if this counter-argument was not addressed?

Think of your essay like a cherry pie. The different ways of using a source are like the parts of that pie:

The **pie crust** is the source(s) that gives **background information** and that gives your pie its foundation. Your crust needs to complement your filling, otherwise it might detract from the taste.

The **cherry filling** is the source(s) that **supports your thesis** and is the key to its flavor. This is also where all the sweetness of the pie is and is the part that everyone should enjoy the most.

The **whipped cream** is the **counterargument** that isn't always needed, but gives your pie extra flavor.

