

Writing From Sources: Rating Scale

The purpose of this scale is to provide definitions of both incorrect and correct use of sources in analytical essays such as those that are often assigned in academic settings. Negative numbers reflect seriously deceptive or incorrect use of sources, while positive numbers present progressively better use of sources in developing a writer's own argument. "Avoiding plagiarism" is the beginning, not the end, of the proper — and the creative — use of sources.

-4=Fraud: Verbatim This is the use of verbatim materials from a source, in whole or in part, without quotation marks, mention of an author, or an indication that they derive from someone else's efforts. This clearly indicates an intent to deceive the reader into believing that this stolen material is the writer's own work.

-3=Fraud: Paraphrase/Summary The writer paraphrases or summarizes a source, in whole or in part, in a way that makes use of someone else's ideas or information without giving credit. This clearly indicates an intent to deceive the reader into believing that this stolen material is the writer's own work. This category also includes fabricating sources, or including sources that exist but that were not in fact consulted.

-2=Inadequate Documentation: General Acknowledgments The writer acknowledges, in a general way, using sources, but does not tie specific pieces of outside material to specific sources. A paper may just have a "Bibliography" at the end, for example, with no parenthetical citations.

-1=Inadequate Documentation: Unclear Citation The document has apparatus for documentation, but format errors or placement of citations make it impossible to tell exactly where the source leaves off and the writer's own ideas begin. An example would be a single general parenthetical citation at the end of a paragraph.

0=Correct Documentation: No Value Added The writer avoids plagiarism but doesn't add anything of his or her own. Usually this involves just using a quotation with proper documentation but no commentary and no integration into an ongoing argument. The selection of a particular passage perhaps reflects an idea, but that idea has not been spelled out explicitly or developed within the paragraph.

1=Correct Documentation: Presents Source Only The document mixes a source's ideas together with the writer's own, with only occasional, inconsistent, or inadequate attempts to discriminate between them. The writer may present facts in a narrative or summary fashion, but does not attempt to interpret or combine them. The source's views come through without enough mediation through the writer's consciousness. The source is documented, often incompletely, but the writer's own voice is difficult to discern.

2=Correct Documentation: Distorted Value Added This refers to an unsuccessful or incomplete attempt to integrate the source's ideas into the writer's own argument. Often this results in a distortion of the source: the writer tries to make the source say what is convenient to the argument, regardless of what the source actually means. Commentary on the source material may be irrelevant or misleading, and may reflect a misunderstanding on the writer's part. The writer's own voice comes through, but the meaning and integrity of the source material are lost.

3=Correct Documentation: Source's and Writer's Voices Not Synthesized The writer presents source material accurately, in a way that shows that he or she understands what has been said, but does not sufficiently synthesize or evaluate the source material. Readers can tell which ideas are the writer's and which are the source's, but cannot be sure how they go together, thus rendering the overall point less than perfectly coherent. Although the source material is not distorted, often only an approximate relationship between the writer's argument and the source material exists.

4=Correct Documentation: Synthesis and Value Added. The document carefully distinguishes the source's ideas from the writer's own. The reader can see the writer engaging with and evaluating material from the source and coming to a reasoned conclusion. The writer has added value to the source material by re-applying it in a different context, by exploring implications in it left undeveloped by the original author, by examining underlying assumptions and evaluating them, or by disagreeing in whole or in part and presenting logical reasons for doing so. Ultimately, the writer uses a fair interpretation of the source's conclusions as evidence in support of the writer's own point.