Integrating Research in Your Writing

You are the writer of your research paper, and your voice takes the lead. Readers are most interested in hearing what you, as the author, learned and what you think. The research you've done adds evidence and integrity to these ideas, providing:
- evidence of a writer's research (you understand the context and voices around your topic)
- the authority of the expert (your argument is not just your personal opinion)
- specificity of ideas and terms (you have read closely and analyzed thoughtfully)

Just don't rely too heavily on your sources. Some writers find themselves stringing others' arguments and quotes together, which causes readers to misunderstand their point—and sometimes leads to unintentional plagiarism. If this is your tendency, try focusing on finding your own ideas in the research process. Then build your outline, write topic sentences, and even draft paragraphs before integrating source material. Doing your own writing is doing your own thinking, and is thus not only a matter of academic integrity but of developing your intellectual and communicative powers.

Ways to Integrate Source Material
There are three ways of incorporating other writers' words into your own writing. All of them require attribution and citation.

Summarizing is describing a writer's main point in your own words. Summaries are significantly shorter than the original and provide an effective overview. Summary is useful when you want to present a whole idea quickly, generally as background information.

Paraphrasing is putting a passage from source material into your own words (not just removing or changing a few words here and there, but restating in an entirely new sentence). Paraphrased material is usually short and focused on details that are most relevant to your argument. Paraphrase is useful when you want to express a specific idea succinctly and in your own voice.

Quotes match the original, word for word, and are placed in quotation marks; they are usually quite short — from a few words to a few sentences. Quotations are useful when the original language is highly specific, expressive, or the very thing you plan to analyze. Consider the following before selecting a quote:
- Beware cutting and pasting — it's never been easier to plagiarize by mistake. Find a clear way to mark your copy-and-pastes (and your transcribed texts) so you don't mistake them for your own.
- Use only the most salient parts in your quotations. Every part of the quote should have an evident reason to be there so your reader will not have to wade through extraneous information. You can provide background information or context in your own words.

Citing Sources
Whenever you use the ideas or words of another, you must cite the source. Citation is essential to avoid plagiarism (presenting someone else's ideas as your own). It's also a way to share your exact research with interested readers.

Follow the citation style your professor requires or one that makes sense for the field you're writing in. See our videos describing the three most popular formatting styles at RISD (APA, MLA, and CMS) and why you might choose them.