

Citing Your Sources' Sources

Signal phrases can help clarify your use of **secondary**, **tertiary**, and **indirect** sources. The distinctions between these source types can differ according to context. But, generally:

- A **primary source** is a first-hand account, or information provided as raw material. Examples include transcripts of speeches, videotaped presentations, autobiographies, interviews, and raw (unanalyzed) data.
- **Secondary sources**, as described by Virginia Tech, are those that “analyze, review, or summarize information in primary resources or other secondary resources.” For example:
 - A transcript of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech is a primary source; a historian’s discussion or analysis of King’s speech is a secondary source.
 - The author of a journal article analyzes raw data (a primary source) collected by a research team, as well as another researcher’s analysis of the same data (a secondary source). When the author draws conclusions about the data and discusses evidence in an article or his or her own, that article becomes a secondary source.
- A **tertiary source** distills or synthesizes information from various primary and secondary sources into a larger compilation. Encyclopedias, handbooks, and biographies are a few examples offered by Virginia Tech.
- An **indirect source** is a source within a source. For example, the author of a book you are consulting—let’s say her name is Perez—cites a journal article *she* consulted that backs up her book’s claims. If you incorporate Perez’s discussion of that article into your paper *rather than reading and citing the original article yourself*, you are using an indirect source. Try to avoid using indirect sources; whenever possible, review and cite the original source instead.

When to Use a Secondary or Indirect Source*

- Use a secondary or indirect source that draws an apt or unique conclusion about another source.
- Use a secondary or indirect source that incorporates data or draws pertinent conclusions from several other sources.
- Use a secondary or indirect source’s nuanced or unique description of other related source material.
- Explain another author’s inclusion of other (indirect) sources to provide validation or clarity.
- Use an indirect source when the original source is not available to you.

How to Incorporate Your Sources' Sources

The following passage incorporates a properly credited indirect source (in this example, the indirect source is also a secondary source). The **indirect source** information is highlighted in yellow; the **primary source** information is highlighted in blue.

Primary and Secondary Source Material
Walker (2008) describes Miguel Roig’s 1999 experiment, which correlates inadequate paraphrasing in student writing with poor reading comprehension. Citing Roig’s data, Walker explains that “students do in fact possess skills necessary for paraphrasing but ... may be impeded from applying those skills when dealing with rigorous text” (p. 387).

NOTE: Include only the **indirect source** (the source *you* consulted) in your reference list. If you are using Chicago Notes and Bibliography as your citation style, include both sources in your footnote (see CMOS 14.273).

***TIP:** *Whenever possible, consult primary sources and your sources’ sources yourself. Upon further investigation, you may find you disagree with the secondary or indirect source author’s analysis or methods.*

