Textual Evidence to Support an Argument

Finding Textual Evidence
It can be daunting to find support for an argument if you do not know where to start! What kind of evidence you use for a paper often depends on the assignment and the academic discipline for which you are writing.
- For an English, philosophy, or theology paper centered on a specific text, use the text.
  - For example, if you are assigned to write a paper for your Literature and Moral Imagination class about the use of sunsets as symbols in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, look for instances in that book where sunsets are mentioned. For this part of the search for sources, rely on that book and the author's words.
- Other times, you might be assigned a paper that will require you to find textual evidence from multiple sources.
  - For example, if you are writing a paper for your history class on the transformation of the role of American women throughout the 20th century, you will need to search for sources outside of your class materials.

When you need to look for outside sources, start by accessing the Xavier Library Databases (https://www.xavier.edu/library/). You may either "Search @ XU" or search for databases ("Databases") that may provide more discipline-specific results to your searches. To provide a few examples, Academic Search Complete is another broad search engine, LexisNexis specializes in newspaper articles, and the MLA International Bibliography or JSTOR provide access to scholarly articles in literature.

Once you have selected a database to search in, draft a few key words. Then, narrow your results by screening the papers by either skimming them or reading their abstracts. It is important to make sure that the sources you find are relevant to your argument. You can also limit your search results by using tools in the database: Search @ XU, for example, allows you to check a box that limits your results to only "Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals," and it also allows you to set a date range for when sources were published.

Helpful Links for Conducting Research
- In addition to databases, Xavier's library offers research guides for different classes and topics (http://libguides.xavier.edu/).
- You can schedule an appointment with a librarian for help with your research process
https://www.xavier.edu/library/ask-a-librarian/schedule-a-consultation/index
- You can also text, email, or call a librarian for assistance
https://www.xavier.edu/library/ask-a-librarian/schedule-a-consultation/index

Types of Evidence to Draw from Sources
- **Statistics**
  - Statistics are especially useful to directly support an argument by establishing logical support via data.

- o Example: In his article for CNN, Gregory Kreig states that Clinton "outpaced President-elect Donald Trump by almost 2.9 million votes, with 65,844,954 (48.2%) to his 62,979,879 (46.1%)."
- **Facts**
  - o Like statistics, facts are useful to directly support your argument. They are a strong form of evidence because they cannot be disputed.
  - o Example: In the 2016 Presidential Election in the United States, Hillary Clinton won the popular vote (Kreig).
- **Experts**
  - o When writing an argument paper, it can be useful to back up your claims with expert opinions or research. This establishes a stronger argument.
  - o Example: Kreig discusses the impact of the election results on the political landscape of the country. He cites an argument to abolish the electoral college by California Democrat Sen. Barbara Boxer: "'This is the only office in the land where you can get more votes and still lose the presidency," Boxer said in a statement. 'The Electoral College is an outdated, undemocratic system that does not reflect our modern society, and it needs to change immediately.'"

How to Incorporate Evidence: Paraphrasing versus Direct Quotations
Now that you've found several sources, make sure that you do not overwhelm your paper with too much quoting and paraphrasing. Instead, remember to balance the textual evidence with your own analysis!

You might choose to **directly quote** from a source when the writer phrases something in a really interesting, compelling way, or when the quote is very specific, possibly includes lots of numbers, and would be awkward to put into your own words.
- o use sparingly
- o use the same exact words as presented in the source
- o distinguish a direct quotation from your own words by using quotation marks
- o directly quote if paraphrasing would distort the meaning
- o use if the author has used the best words possible

Example: According to Fortune and Enger (2005), "regardless of the particular religious affiliation alongside the trauma of violence, the majority of women will be dealing with some aspect of religious beliefs and teachings which will serve either as a resource or roadblock."

You might choose to **paraphrase** when you need to condense some ideas to fit the organization of your paper or when the original is phrases in a way that would not be appropriate for your audience (for example, it is too formal, informal, or discipline-specific for a general reader).
- o allows you to put the information from a source into your own words
- o useful for condensing information from a source to a few sentences
- o **Example**: On the other hand, religion also plays a role in the lives of abused women, and this role is also two-sided. For one, it can serve as a source of comfort, liberation, and empowerment. Yet, it can also contribute to the continuation of a cycle of violence, especially in the realm of violence in marriage, because many religions emphasize the importance of maintaining family order and happiness (Fortune & Enger, 2005).

Always remember: for both paraphrasing and direct quotes, you **must** cite the source!
- The Writing Center provides helpful online resources for citation (https://www.xavier.edu/writingcenter/tipsheets-and-resources-page) and also has citation handbooks and style guides available for reference at the center.