

Providing Information About a Source

When writers use source material in their texts they usually provide information about the cited source. If the writer decides to cite an author's work, he or she may provide information about the cited author's life, credentials, and/or professional experience; the writer might also find it necessary to talk about the publication information (the publication date, where the source was published, and for whom it was published). Writers will include information about the sources they use for any number of reasons, however writers commonly talk about their cited sources for particular reasons:

1. Signal that source material is now being used to communicate an idea
2. Contextualize a source, providing information about the source and the author
3. Demonstrate that they are responsible, trustworthy, and credible
4. Show how their evidence supports their arguments
5. Show the reader how they feel about a particular source

Attributions or attributive tags are statements that assign credit to the cited source, particularly to the author for something he or she has said or done. These "tags" are common in expository writing. Attributions (and other types of source information) serve to contextualize the cited source. To contextualize (in this case) is to show where an idea originated, to provide the necessary information needed to answer questions like "who is speaking," "what is this about," "where did this happen," and "when did this take place."

What do attributions and/or attributive tags look like? The following examples provide a few ways writers might assign credit and/or contextualize a cited source. While reading the examples, examine the information being provided and study the various constructions to see how writers talk about the sources they use in their texts.

The following are examples of how authors provide information about cited sources.

Example 1:

In the June 17 issue of *Time* magazine, Joe Klein...

In this example, the author names the magazine that published Klein's article and provides the publication date.

Example 2:

"Direct Quotation," says Tim Barnett, a marine physicist at Scripps...

In this example, the attribution comes at the end. This construction is common in newspapers and various news articles. This tag provides the name of the cited author (Tim Barnett) and states his professional career.

Example 3:

Amy Chua, a law professor and international businesswoman, argues that...

This third example differs from the first two in both its form and function. Notice that the writer has chosen to talk about the cited author but does not mention the author's text. Instead, this writer has provided for the reader the cited author's name and her professional experience.

Example 4:

In Selections from *Into the Wild*, John Krakauer reclaims...

In this example, the attribution comes at the end and the text is named. This construction is common in newspapers and various news articles.

Example 5:

In his article "Behind the Official Story," James C. Scott—Director of the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University and Sterling Professor of Political Science and Anthropology—states...

Example five has elements from both the third and fourth examples, creating yet another way to introduce source information. From this example, we learn the name of the cited author (James C. Scott), the title of his work, and about his professional experience.

Example 6:

According to a CBS news poll...

This information is designed to let the reader know that the cited source material came from a CBS news poll. Why is this important? Because a reader is going to question where the writer found his or her data. If the results of a survey were given, yet the source of that survey was withheld, the reader would have a hard time believing the results of that survey.