hen you begin to draft your paper, you will need to decide what role each of your sources will play in your argument. In other words, you will need to figure out what you're going to *do* with the source in your paper. As you consider what role each source will play in your paper, you should begin by thinking about the role that source played in your research process. How did the source shape your thinking about the topic when you encountered it? If a source provided you with context for a particular problem or issue, then it may well do the same thing for your reader. If a source provided you with evidence that supports your claim, then you will probably want to lay out that evidence to your reader and explain how it leads you to the position you've staked out in your paper. If a source made an argument that challenged your own argument and made you refine your thinking, then you'll likely want to introduce that source in your paper as a counterargument before explaining why you have concluded that your own argument is stronger. On the other hand, if a source offered evidence or ideas that complicated your own thinking and made you shift your argument, you should explain how the source has led you to your new position.

**Here's a list of questions to help you decide how you're going to use each of your sources:**

* **Does your assignment include instructions on source use?**

Some assignments will ask you to respond in a specific way to a source. For example, you might be asked to test a theory developed in one source by using a body of evidence found in another source. Or you might be asked to respond to a claim or assumption laid out in a particular source. Other assignments may specify the number of sources you should use, but will not include instructions on how you should use those sources.

* **Does the source provide context or background information about your topic?**

A source can orient you to the historical context of an issue or idea, review the literature on a topic, or provide other background information. If you found background information in a source, you may decide to use parts of it in your paper to orient your reader in a similar way. Remember that even sources you use for background information or context must be cited in your paper.

* **Has the source shaped your argument by raising a question, suggesting a line of thinking, or providing a provocative quotation?**

Some sources will help you develop your thinking on a topic by raising questions you hadn't considered or making claims that shape your thinking.

* **Does the source serve as an authoritative voice in support of your claim?**

? If an authoritative source supports your claim, you'll want to cite it in your paper. However, if a source makes the same argument you're making, you will need to ask yourself what your paper is adding to what that source has already said (see the [plagiarism section](http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page355346) of this Guide for a discussion of what to do if you find a source late in the process that is making the same argument as you are). Ask yourself these questions: Are you extending or complicating the source's claim in some way? Are you bringing new evidence to bear on the source's idea?

* **Does the source provide evidence for your claim?**

A source may provide data that supports a claim you're making. You will use this source in your paper as evidence for your claim, integrating the relevant passages or data into your own argument and explaining its significance.

* **Does the source make a counterargument that you will disagree with or take a position that complicates your own position?**

Rather than leaving out sources that disagree with you, make sure to include those sources and explain why you disagree with them or how they complicate your own position. Doing so strengthens your position by showing that you can respond to ideas that seem to challenge or contradict your own.

Remember that a source can—and often will—play more than one role in your argument. Each time you mention a source in your paper, you should review these questions and make sure you have a clear sense of what you're doing with that source in your paper.