

Reading for Essays

When we research essays, we should read a few different texts to find interesting ideas to collect into an argument. It can be hard to understand new topics, but there are several things we can do to help understand what we're reading:

1. Use AI Tools to Simplify Texts

- **Goal:** Break down complex ideas into simpler language.
- **How:** You can use AI tools to rephrase challenging sections or summarise long passages. Ask for explanations or for key points from the article to be restated in simpler terms.
 - Example prompt: *Please simplify this adult-level article for young teenagers (ages 13-15) who are second-language speakers. Use simpler words and short, clear sentences. Break down complex ideas into smaller, easy-to-understand parts. Avoid advanced or technical terms and explain any necessary vocabulary in a simple way. Focus on making the text engaging and understandable for their level. Additionally, define 10 key words to help learners understand the most important ideas relating to this topic.*

2. Use Dictionary and Thesaurus Tools

- **Goal:** Understand unfamiliar vocabulary and terms in context.
- **How:** Use online tools to quickly look up definitions and synonyms for unfamiliar words.
 - Example tools: <https://www.merriam-webster.com> and <https://www.thesaurus.com>

3. Summarise Using a Text Summariser

- **Goal:** Get a concise version of an article.
- **How:** Online tools can summarise lengthy or complex articles into a few sentences. These tools focus on the key points, making it easier to understand the gist without reading every detail.
 - Example tool: <https://tldrthis.com>

4. Use Google Scholar for Additional Context

- **Goal:** Find academic papers or simplified overviews on the same topic.
- **How:** Search for articles, reviews, or papers on similar topics to provide more background information. Often, abstracts of scholarly articles give clear summaries of the key issues.
 - Tool: <https://scholar.google.com>

Quoting Your Research

When you've found evidence for your essay (this can be as simple as a quote from an article or research paper), you need to quote it properly to avoid plagiarising the author. Read on to understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

1. Understand Plagiarism:

- **What it is:** Copying someone else's work without giving them credit.
- **Why it's bad:** It's dishonest and can lead to serious consequences. Students who plagiarise will be removed from i-Learner's Essay Competition. In school and at university, exam grades can be lowered and students can be expelled if they are found to be plagiarising.

2. Use Your Own Words:

- **Summarise:** Condense the main ideas into your own words.
- **Paraphrase:** Restate the information in a different way.

3. Quote Directly:

- **Use quotation marks:** "Put the exact words in quotes."
- **Cite the source:** Give credit to the original author.

4. Cite Your Sources [more information below]:

- **You can use an existing citation style:** MLA, APA, or Chicago.
- **You may also use a consistent format of your own:** This is the minimum requirement in i-Learner's Essay Competition, though usage of existing styles is welcome.
- **Include:** author's name, title, year of publication and page for printed texts and author's name, title, website name, webpage link, and the date accessed for online sources.

5. Use Online Tools:

- **Citation generators:** Make it easier to format your citations.
- **Plagiarism checkers:** Help you identify any accidental plagiarism.

6. Double-Check Your Work:

- **Review your citations:** Ensure they are accurate and complete.
- **Proofread:** Check for spelling and grammar errors.

A Beginner's Guide to Citing Sources

Why Cite Sources?

Citing sources is giving credit to the people whose ideas you've used. It shows that you're being honest and respectful of their work. It also helps other people who might want to learn more about the topic you're writing about. As mentioned above, there can be serious consequences if you fail to cite sources correctly.

How to Cite Sources: A Simple Method

Here's a simple way to cite your sources (note: there is not one correct citation method; you should follow the one you're asked to use when writing in future):

1. Number Your Sources:

- Assign a number to each source you use.
- For example, the first source could be 1, the second 2, and so on.

2. Use Footnotes or Endnotes:

- **Footnotes:** A small number at the bottom of the page, followed by a note that gives the source information.
- **Endnotes:** A numbered list of sources at the end of your essay.

3. Format Your Citations:

- **Author's name:** Last name, First name.
- **Title of the work:** In italics.
- **Publication information:** Year of publication.
- **Page number (if applicable):** For direct quotes.

Example:

Cats have been domesticated for thousands of years, and their history is rich and fascinating. As John Doe notes in *The History of Cats*, "Cats were revered in ancient Egypt, where they were often depicted in art and mythology"¹. This ancient connection to humans has shaped the role of cats in human society, making them beloved companions and effective pest control.

Footnote / Endnote:

1. John Doe, *The History of Cats* (2023), p. 42.

Note: You should use footnotes *or* endnotes, not both.

4. Tips for Citing Different Types of Sources:

- **Books:** Author, Title, Year, Page Number.
- **Articles:** Author, "Article Title," Journal Title, Volume Number, Issue Number, Year, Page Numbers.
- **Websites:** Author (if known), "Title of the Page," Website Name, URL, Accessed Date.

5. Consistency is Key

The most important thing is to be consistent. Once you choose a format, stick with it throughout your essay.

Remember:

- **Don't plagiarise:** Always use your own words or quote directly and cite the source.
- **Ask your teacher for help:** If you're unsure about anything, don't hesitate to ask your teacher for guidance.

By following these simple steps, you can properly cite your sources and avoid plagiarism.