Using Useful Sources

(1) There are three kinds of sources:
   a. Primary Sources:
      i. is source material is an original source of the information being discussed. It can be a novel or a painting or a cookbook, things like that. *You can interpret these sources, but you cannot use their opinions as facts or use them to directly support your argument.*
   b. Secondary Sources:
      i. relate or discuss *information* originally presented elsewhere. Secondary sources involve generalization, analysis, synthesis, interpretation, or evaluation of the original information. (You know, stuff you’re suppose to be doing.)
   c. Tertiary Sources:
      i. often summarize what primary and secondary sources have said. An example is an encyclopedia. They usually don’t include documentation and are very general. They are not the best sources to use.

The trick: *Don’t just look for sources that say exactly what you’re trying to prove. By disagreeing with a source or expanding their argument, you can take up more space on the page.*

(2) A quick checklist to know if your sources are good ones:
   a. Is there an author?
      i. Always be suspect of someone who won’t put their name on something. Otherwise it may be a promotional, propagandist, or an incredibly biased website.
   b. Is there a works cited page?
      i. This shows the author did his research. Which is good.
   c. What journal published the article? Or what press published the book?
      i. University presses are always a good sign.
   d. What database did you find the reference in?
      i. You didn’t just use google, did you?
   e. Does the author give his methods?
      i. This shows they trust their work because they’re inviting others to double check them.

The trick: *Using a smart source makes you seem smart. Using a dumb one…well…*
(3) There are three ways to use your sources. You must include an in-text citation for each of these. Try to use a signal phrase and a parenthetical citation for all of these. For example: John Smith says, “The world is round” (27).

The trick: Signal phrases and parentheticals are really important because they let the professor know when your source’s ideas start and when they stop. That way, the professor can give you credit for everything else on the page, since it’ll be all your own original ideas and thoughts.

a. Use a direct quote:
   i. When the author is as concise as possible (that is, you can’t possibly say it in less words).
   ii. The author is a major authority and you want to borrow his mojo.
   iii. You are disagreeing with the author, and you need to be as fair and not misrepresent what he or she is saying.

b. Paraphrase
   i. Paraphrase uses roughly the same amount of words, but they’re entirely your own.
   ii. Use it when the author is unnecessarily wordy or confusing.
      1. When you want their idea, but not their words.

c. Summarize
   i. Summary takes a larger amount of text and condenses it.
   ii. It is entirely your own words.
   iii. It’s also used when you want the author’s idea, but not their words.

The trick: Use a source’s ideas rather than just facts or numbers. This way you can discuss whether or not you agree with the source and why. Then you seem smart and like you have opinions about things.

The final trick: After a citation, always explain how it proves your topic sentence and/or thesis. Repeat key terms. This will make it seem like your paper is proving something.