Tutoring and Writing Center
Illinois Valley Community College

How Much Source Information to Use

Overall, your essay should feel like it is composed of your argument in your voice. There should not be so much source information that it begins to feel like quotes and paraphrases from others that have been strung together. Your goal should be that most of the content is your ideas, your paraphrases of an author's ideas, your analysis, and your conclusions. Aim to not let source information overwhelm your own writing.

There is no strict rule about how much source information an essay should use, although your assignment likely specifies a number of sources. All assignments are different, but in any writing situation, the writer should be careful about using too much source information. One way to ensure that your essay is not overwhelmed by sources is to limit the number of long quotations (or "block" quotations) you use. Another key idea is to avoid relying too much on one source throughout the essay. Depending a great deal on one source makes your essay seem like it is parroting the ideas of another author rather than presenting an original argument. In all, choose your source information wisely, space it out in the essay, and emphasize your own thoughts.