



Material

Forming the piece's material will allow you to refine what you are saying in your piece, your evidence, and the message you hope to convey to your reader.

You might need to develop your piece's material if...

- You understand what you want to convey in the piece (e.g., main ideas, argument, plot, etc.) but have not yet figured out the details or how to convey your ideas to your audience.
- You are not sure who to cite or what others say about the topic.
- You are not confident about how your ideas are unique from or relate to similarly written pieces.
- You're not sure what form this piece needs to take.

Guiding Questions:

- What do you know about this topic?
- What do you need to know to move this piece forward?
- What research do you need to do to learn more? Who has written about this topic before?
- What images or other resources will enhance your presentation of the material?
- What opinions have other people had about this question or idea, and how do those connect with yours?
- What questions do you have that you would like to attempt answering in this piece?



Overview

You can use this strategy to visualize how your ideas relate to one another, as well as how your argument responds to other thinkers. What does the “conversation” look like surrounding this question?



Strategy 1: Mapping

How to Use Mapping

- Gather the source materials you're using for this piece in one place so you can access them easily.
- For each source, write one or two key sentences or ideas you'd like to use for your piece. You can write each idea on a sticky note or note card, or you can use a digital tool like [Miro](#) or [Coggle](#) to create virtual sticky notes.
- Start to move and connect your ideas physically or on your online board. Which ideas do you see as connected? How would your sources disagree or agree with one another?
- You might identify some sources or ideas as key to your argument, and others as more secondary. You can color code these, move them, or find another way to represent how important they are to your idea.
- Create a sticky note or note card for your emerging argument– where would it sit in relationship to your other sources?



Strategy 2: Conversation

Overview

Sometimes our ideas shift into clarity when we talk them out. You might approach a friend or colleague to discuss some of your ideas. You will want to record the conversation in some way, whether by asking your conversation partner to write down key ideas, or by using a digital tool.


How to Use Conversation

- Start by explaining the goals and context of your piece to your partner, then talk through your main points and sources.
- Ask your partner to either write down key ideas or reflections as you speak. You might also use a simple recording tool like [Google Recorder](#) so you can hear the conversation later. You could also try an AI tool like [Speak](#) that generates a word cloud and other analytics as it records.
- You might consider using an AI tool like [ChatGPT](#) to enrich your conversation. If you're struggling to come up with ideas, prompt ChatGPT to give you a starting list, tell you what other writers have done before, or give you tips for writing in a specific genre. You can also prompt ChatGPT to give you example pieces of writing.
- Establish an action plan for yourself after this conversation. What ideas came into clarity that you'll embed in your piece? What questions arose that might need further research?

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Overview

You may need to look outside for sources to spark inspiration. Source material could come from articles, books, personal experience, exhibitions, or artwork. When gathering source material, it's important to record your findings by writing down concepts that connect to or challenge your existing ideas.



Strategy 3: Notetaking

How to Use Notetaking

- Gather your source materials and begin to scan through them.
- Keep a record or folder of each source you read so you can return to them later.. You might use Zotero or Mendeley to digitally annotate, highlight, and organize your texts. These tools will generate citations for each of your sources.
- You might also create a spreadsheet with each of your sources in a column, where you can compare and contrast the different views expressed in your source materials by filling in the cells.
- You might record jottings, key words, quotes, or summaries of the key arguments in each of your pieces in a physical notebook, or in an online notebook such as OneNote, Evernote or Obsidian. Make sure you color code, mark or clearly label where each idea has come from, so that you do not risk plagiarizing.



Strategy 4: Quoting

Overview

Quotes can add specificity and depth to your writing, but it's important to integrate them so that your voice continues to shine through. Only use direct quotations when the source's author phrases something so well that summarizing it would change its impact or if the source author is considered an expert on the topic.

How to Use Quoting

- Ask yourself what the quote is doing for your piece. How can you frame that for your reader? Introduce your quotation in the context of your argument. They Say, I Say has helpful sentence starters for this.
- Use a tool like Purdue OWL to help you format and cite your quotation properly. You can browse APA, MLA, Chicago, and other citation styles on the site. Reference managers such as Zotero and Mendeley can also help you generate an in-text citation.
- Tie the explanation directly to what you're trying to say in the piece. You'll need at least two or three sentences to do this, as it's not the same thing as merely summarizing the other author's point. How exactly does the quotation relate to what you're saying? Why exactly does this other author's point matter in your piece of writing?