For almost all of your college essays and papers, you will have to do outside research and use the results to try to prove some argument (even if your argument is simply an implied “I have acquired significant knowledge about this topic”). To do so effectively, keep the following tips in mind.

**Do some research before you write your thesis.** Many students make the mistake of deciding what they want to argue first and then realizing that there isn’t enough support for their argument. Begin your paper with an open mind. Do some general research into your topic first so that you can form an opinion based on the evidence, rather than forming an opinion and then trying to force the evidence to fit.

Generally, **the quality of your research counts for more than the quantity.** If you cite three peer-reviewed articles from scholarly journals, you’ll sound more knowledgeable and make your argument more convincingly than you will if you cite nine Wikipedia pages and a personal blog.

Make **sure to cite your sources** whenever you quote, summarize, paraphrase, or otherwise use them in your essay. This will help you avoid plagiarism and will give you opportunities to demonstrate the credibility of your sources. Whenever you introduce a new source, state the author’s full name, main credentials, and the title of the publication you’re quoting or referencing. A signal phrase giving this information might look like this: *In his new book, Food is Life, Stanford University food expert Hungry McTummy writes…*

You use research to support your arguments, not the other way around. Your papers shouldn’t be so full of quotes, summaries, paraphrases, statistics, and facts pulled from your research that there isn’t any room for your own writing. Instead of filling up the pages with research, **present only your strongest supporting evidence and use your own words to analyze the evidence and explain how it proves your point.** Remember that the ultimate goal of your paper is to argue your thesis. Your research exists to support your thesis and your writing, not the other way around. Don’t let outside sources take over your paper.

As always, if you have any questions or problems with your research, feel free to see a tutor at the English Center.