

WORKING WITH A SOURCE

- Often, writers use sources to help support their own ideas and opinions. An outside source, such as an essay or article, can be a valuable tool for conveying a message.
- The key to using a source effectively is not to rely too heavily on its message. **YOUR MESSAGE, AS THE WRITER, IS MORE IMPORTANT!** The relationship between writer and source is interactive—your source should complement your ideas, not control them!

To help you use a source correctly, remember this analogy:

Writing with a source is like driving a car. You (as the writer) have the power to be in the **driver's seat**, the **passenger's seat**, or in the **trunk**. It depends on how much control you take, and how much control you assign to your source.



Here's a guide to knowing where you are in your "car" – or whether you are in control of your writing:



THE DRIVER'S SEAT: In the driver's seat, you have taken **full** control of your own writing. **You** decide where the source can sit (the passenger's seat or the trunk), depending on how much control you want to assign to the source. When you're in the driver's seat, **you** are in charge of every word in your paper. You may have deleted your entire draft, but **DON'T WORRY!** Even if you're left with only an idea, it's **YOUR IDEA!** When you're in the driver's seat, writing is not so confusing or stressful. The key to remaining in the driver's seat is to think about every word that you write. If you're unsure about something's relation to your thesis, **read** it again! Re-read it until you can **decide** whether or not it's important. Every writer has "trunk moments." Revision is the way to combat the out-of-control feeling. In the driver's seat, you have a destination, and you're excited about going there. Even if you take a wrong turn, you know how to get back on course. You can use your source effectively; with **you** in the driver's seat, **you** decide where the source belongs.



THE PASSENGER'S SEAT: When you're in the passenger's seat, you need to take a serious look at your writing. If you're a passenger in your car, who's in the driver's seat? When the source is in the driver's seat, you (as the writer) are simply along for the ride; your source is making decisions for you! In the passenger's seat, you're simply driving around, looking out the window; you have no clear destination or logical map to follow. You know that your writing is out of your control, but you're not sure what to do about it. Remember, what's lacking in this position is the connection between evidence from your source and your own original ideas. To regain your position as the driver, begin with a very simple exercise. Read your source, and decide what you think about it. **The first step in regaining control is to think!** When you know what you think about your topic, you can revise your writing to support ***your ideas***, not your source's ideas. Your entire draft may need to be revised. Search for and eliminate anything that doesn't support ***your ideas***.



THE TRUNK: If you're in the trunk, you have absolutely no idea what's going on in the car. You may be bound, gagged and unconscious in there, depending upon how long you've been writing without control. In the trunk, you can't even point to things as you drive by; you are a silent, almost nonexistent passenger. You don't know where your source is taking you, and it seems that it's impossible to find out. Typical "Trunk Behavior" includes quoting your source in the introduction, not being able to identify your thesis statement, and worrying constantly that you've plagiarized because your ideas are not your own. Writing from the trunk is not an enjoyable experience; it's dark, confusing, and stressful in there! The good news is that getting out of the trunk is not as difficult as it seems. All you have to do is recognize that you have given up control of your own writing, and **make a commitment to writing from your own perspective, with confidence and conviction in your original ideas**. When you believe in your ideas, you can begin to think about incorporating a source into your writing. With a firm commitment to ***your original ideas***, you're ready to revise your draft; and that's driver's seat work!

**REMEMBER... WHEN THEY'RE YOUR IDEAS, YOU DECIDE WHAT'S IMPORTANT!
YOU ARE IN CONTROL OF YOUR OWN WRITING!**