

## Writing From Sources: Rating Scale

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The purpose of this scale is to provide definitions and examples of both incorrect and correct use of sources in analytical essays such as those that are often assigned in academic settings. Negative numbers reflect seriously deceptive or incorrect use of sources, while positive numbers present progressively better use of sources in developing a writer's own argument. "Avoiding plagiarism" is the beginning, not the end, of the proper—and the creative—use of sources.

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**-4= Fraud: Verbatim.** Use of verbatim materials from source, in whole or in part, without quotation marks, mention of an author, or an indication that they come from a source. There is a clear intent to deceive the reader into believing that this stolen material is the writer's own work.

**-3= Fraud: Paraphrase/Summary.** Paraphrases or summarizes a source, in whole or in part, in a way that makes use of someone else's ideas or information without giving credit. This could also involve fabricating sources, or including sources that exist but that were not in fact consulted, or leaving out sources that were used. There is a clear intent to deceive the reader into believing that these stolen ideas are the writer's own work.

**-2= Inadequate Documentation: General Acknowledgments.** The writer acknowledges, in a general way, that sources were used, but specific pieces of outside material are not tied to specific sources. A paper may just have a "Bibliography" at the end, for example, with no parenthetical citations.

**-1= Inadequate Documentation: Unclear Citation.** Has apparatus for documentation, but placement of citations or format errors make it impossible to tell exactly where the source leaves off and the writer's own ideas begin. An example would be a single general parenthetical citation at the end of a long paragraph.

**0=Correct Documentation: No Value Added.** Avoids plagiarism, but doesn't add anything of the writer's own. Usually this involves just using a quotation with proper documentation but no commentary and no integration into an ongoing argument. The selection of a particular passage reflects an idea, perhaps, but that idea has not been spelled out explicitly or developed within the paragraph.

**1=Correct Documentation: Presents Source Only.** Mixes source ideas together with writer's own, with only occasional attempt to discriminate. The writer may present facts in a narrative or summary fashion, but does not attempt to interpret or combine them. The source's views come through without enough mediation through writer's consciousness. The source is documented, often incompletely, but the writer's own voice is lost.

**2=Correct Documentation: Distorted Value Added.** Incomplete attempt to integrate source's ideas into writer's own argument. Often this results in a distortion of the source: the writer tries to make the source say what is convenient to the argument, regardless of what the source actually means. Comment on the source material may be irrelevant or misleading, and may reflect a misunderstanding on the writer's part. The writer's own voice is heard, but the meaning and integrity of the source material is lost.

**3=Correct Documentation: Source's and Writer's Voices Not Synthesized.** Usually makes it possible to distinguish source's ideas from writer's own; occasionally mentions sources by name. Writer presents source material accurately, in a way that shows that the writer understands what has been said, but does not sufficiently synthesize or evaluate the source material. We can tell which is the writer's and which is the source's, but we're not quite sure how they go together. Although the source material is not distorted, there often is only an approximate relation between the writer's argument and the source material.

**4=Correct Documentation: Synthesis and Value Added.** Frequently identifies source by name, and carefully separates source's ideas from writer's own. The reader can see the writer comparing and evaluating material from source and coming to a reasoned conclusion. The writer has added value to the source material by re-applying it in a different context, by exploring implications in it left undeveloped by the original author, by examining underlying assumptions and evaluating them, by disagreeing in whole or in part and presenting logical reasons for doing so, or by using a fair interpretation of the source's conclusions as evidence in support of the writer's own argument.

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## Exercise on Use of Sources

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**Directions: Evaluate each of the following passages, all based on the same excerpt from an article on Thomas Jefferson by Joseph J. Ellis. Give each passage a rating based on “Writing From Sources: Rating Scale” ranging from -4 to +4, and be prepared to explain why you assigned that number.**

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1. \_\_\_\_\_ Joseph J. Ellis writes:

Thomas Jefferson was many things, but mostly he was a creature of paradox: the wealthy Virginia aristocrat who wrote the most famous statement of equality in American history; the sincere advocate of agrarian simplicity who worshipped the art and architecture of Paris; above all, the fervent believer in human freedom who lived his entire life as a slave owner. The last paradox has always seemed the most poignant, in part because Jefferson himself acknowledged the massive gap between his principled ideals and his personal reality, and in part because the paradox Jefferson lived was emblematic of the larger disjunction in American society—now generally regarded as the central dilemma of American history—between the promise of liberty and the fact of racial discrimination. (46)

Another biographer of Jefferson has said...

### WORKS CITED

Ellis, Joseph J. “Jefferson's Cop-out.” *Civilization* 3: (December/January, 1996-97): 46-53.

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2. \_\_\_\_\_ I think that Jefferson was a hypocrite because he said he was against slavery but he owned slaves. He knew it, too, and he got away with it because his hypocrisy was the same as America’s hypocrisy, the gap between the ideals of freedom and the reality of color-based prejudice.

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3. \_\_\_\_\_ Kids don’t have any heroes to look up to in contemporary society, so we need to look to the past to find examples of leaders who approached perfection. We need to remember our Founding Fathers as men of unblemished good character and important accomplishments. For example, Joseph J. Ellis calls Thomas Jefferson a “fervent believer in human freedom,” a “sincere advocate of agrarian simplicity,” a man of “principled ideals,” and the author of “the most famous statement of equality in American history” (46).

### WORKS CITED

Ellis, Joseph J. “Jefferson's Cop-out.” *Civilization* 3: (December/January, 1996-97): 46-53.

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4. \_\_\_\_\_ Now, under the so-called “Patriot Act,” it is Muslim-Americans who must live under the shadow of suspicion and fear. It is another chapter in the central dilemma of American history—between the promise of liberty and the fact of racial discrimination.

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5. \_\_\_\_\_ Joseph J. Ellis argues that Jefferson inhabited throughout his life a series of contradictions between his beliefs, which were liberal and far ahead of their time, and his own behavior and position in society, which forced him into a much more conservative position (46). But Jefferson was not the only one who had to face the disjunction between a belief in freedom and the reality of being an owner of slaves. George Washington, for example, never expressed abolitionist sentiments, but he freed his slaves in his will.

### WORKS CITED

Ellis, Joseph J. “Jefferson's Cop-out.” *Civilization* 3: (December/January, 1996-97): 46-53.

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6. \_\_\_\_\_ As Joseph J. Ellis said in 1997 in “Jefferson’s Cop-out” published in *Civilization* volume 3, pages 46-53, Jefferson lived his whole life as a slave owner. He could have freed his slaves, but he didn’t because he couldn’t afford to keep his farm going at Monticello if he did.

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7. \_\_\_\_\_ Now that DNA tests have established that Thomas Jefferson almost certainly *was* the father of at least one child by his slave Sally Hemmings, we can add yet another layer to the paradox Jefferson lived. He was an aristocrat who believed in equality, a slaveowner who advocated abolition, a man who loved the simple rural life but was also a sophisticated connoisseur of European architecture. Now we find out that he was also a man who denounced black women as inherently unattractive in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, yet he was sleeping with one himself.

### WORKS CITED

Ellis, Joseph J. “Jefferson's Cop-out.” *Civilization* 3: (December/January, 1996-97): p. 46.

Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

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8. \_\_\_\_ If we look at history more closely, it becomes harder and harder to find anybody who is an unblemished hero. One famous American, Thomas Jefferson, was many things, but mostly he was a creature of paradox: a wealthy Virginian who wrote a famous statement of equality, a sincere advocate of simplicity who worshiped the art and architecture of Paris; above all, a strong believer in human freedom who lived his entire life as a slave owner. Jefferson himself acknowledged the massive gap between his principled ideals and his personal reality. We may not like to think so, but our whole American society is caught in that same central dilemma: between the promise of liberty and the fact of racial discrimination.

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9. \_\_\_\_ If Jefferson was, as Joseph J. Ellis has argued, “a creature of paradox” (46), it was not because of his personal flaws so much as because of the times in which he lived. We should remember that a “paradox” is not just a “contradiction.” If you just contradict yourself, then you should find a way to be more consistent; if you inhabit a paradox, then you’re in a no-win situation and you have to muddle through as best you can. It’s easy for us to throw stones at Jefferson for not freeing his slaves, despite his announced opposition to the institution of slavery. But we have to ask ourselves: where would those slaves have gone, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century? How would they have lived, in a society in which there were very few opportunities for “free blacks” to make a living in a world that was prejudiced against them? Would it have been more moral of Jefferson to follow his abstract beliefs, if it meant that he was not so much offering his slaves the promise of freedom but rather condemning them to poverty and privation?

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Ellis, Joseph J. “Jefferson's Cop-out.” *Civilization* 3: (December/January, 1996-97): 46-53.

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10. \_\_\_\_ Although Thomas Jefferson believed in freedom, he couldn’t quite bring himself to free his slaves. Although he believed in living a simple rural life, he spent years living a cosmopolitan life in Paris, and served two terms in the White House at the center of American power. Although he believed in equality, he considered himself an aristocrat. All of these things make this central figure American history more complex, and it shows the ways in which American history as a whole is hard to get a grasp on, because it, too, is riddled with paradoxes. We live in a country of freedom and oppression, of ideals and cynicism, of opportunity and hopelessness. Which America you live in depends on who you are. Jefferson is particularly interesting because he managed to have one foot in two of these Americas at the same time, and it almost tore him apart. Whether the problems of post-9/11 America will now tear this society apart remains an open question, but an examination of Jefferson can help to point us to an answer (Ellis 46).

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Ellis, Joseph J. “Jefferson's Cop-out.” *Civilization* 3: (December/January, 1996-97): 46-53.

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11. \_\_\_\_ Joseph Ellis sees Thomas Jefferson as a “creature of paradox.” He portrays Jefferson as a rich man who believed in democracy, and as a gentleman farmer who truly enjoyed the rural life, and yet was also comfortable with sophisticated European art. And most problematic of all, according to Ellis, was the contradiction between his commitment to liberty and his status as a life-long owner of slaves himself. Ellis argues that Jefferson’s story is a symbol of a larger “disjunction” in American history, which is also full of paradoxes “between the promise of liberty and the fact of racial discrimination” (46).

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12. \_\_\_\_ Joseph J. Ellis portrays Thomas Jefferson as a man who embodied, in his life and in his beliefs, “the central dilemma of American history” (46). For Ellis, the “most poignant” aspect of Jefferson as a “creature of paradox” (46) was that he believed deeply in freedom, yet he couldn’t quite bring himself to free his slaves. Ellis calls attention to other important tensions as well: although Jefferson believed in living a simple rural life, he spent years living a cosmopolitan life in Paris, and served two terms in the White House at the center of American power; although he believed in equality, he considered himself an aristocrat. Ellis’s portrait makes this central figure in American history more complex, and he suggests that American history as a whole is hard to get a grasp on, because it, too, is riddled with paradoxes. Ellis’s argument about American historical paradoxes is even more valid today than it was in Jefferson’s time. We live in a country of freedom and oppression, of ideals and cynicism, of opportunity and hopelessness. Which America you live in depends on who you are. Jefferson is particularly interesting because, as Ellis demonstrates, he managed to have one foot in two of these Americas at the same time, and it almost tore him apart. Whether the problems of post-9/11 America will now tear this society apart remains an open question, but an examination of Jefferson can help to point us to an answer.

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