Use of Secondary Sources
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Secondary sources are used to support the point you are arguing in your writing—not to make the argument for you.

According to the website for UC Berkeley's Education Psychology Library, primary sources are "original documents or objects, such as an artifact or creative work" ("Primary"), including:
- Original creative works (e.g., novels, plays, poems)
- The author's materials (e.g., diaries, journals, letters)
- Contemporary accounts of events (e.g., newspaper articles, journals, reviews from the time)
- Official records (e.g., government documents, legislation from the time)
- Non-text items can also be primary sources (e.g., photographs, artefacts from the time)

In contrast, secondary sources "describe, interpret, analyze, evaluate, explain, comment on, or develop theories related to a topic. They are often written after-the-fact, with hindsight. They may merely point to primary materials" ("Primary").

In his book *Writing Your Masters Dissertation*, Chris Hart makes a number of helpful and important points about the use of secondary sources and quotations, telling his reader to use quotations "to give backing to what you have to say, especially to an argument you are aiming to make", but also warning them, "Do not over-use them or it may give the impression you are 'padding-out' your dissertation, hoping to disguise the fact you have little to say" (423).
This is important to keep in mind for everyone who does any kind of academic writing, not just for social scientists and not just for people who are writing masters dissertations.

Hart then provides a bulleted list of important points about quotations (423):
- Use quotations to support, not make a point.
- Select quotations which are clear, distinctive or authoritative.
- Do not use quotations which summarize what you have already said.
- If someone has said something better than you can, or in a way that paraphrasing would only reproduce the essence of the quote, use the quote.
- Always cite, giving proper attribution, to every source you quote or paraphrase.
- Never quote out of context; distorting another's sense is unethical behaviour.

You cannot just drop quotations into your text without context, or without integrating them into your own prose. Instead, "[y]ou must construct a clear, grammatically correct sentence that allows you to introduce or incorporate a quotation with complete accuracy" or else "paraphrase the original and quote only in fragments, which may be easier to integrate into the text" (Gibaldi 93).

When you use quotations, "[t]hey must reproduce the original sources exactly. Unless indicated in brackets or parentheses [...], changes must not be made in the spelling, capitalization, or interior punctuation of the source" (Gibaldi 93).

You can make changes to a quotation, but any changes you make must be clear to the reader. In the *MLA Handbook*, Gibaldi writes, "Whenever you wish to omit a word, a phrase, a sentence, or more from a quoted passage, you should be guided by two principles: fairness to the author quoted and the grammatical integrity of your writing" (93). You should never quote in such a way that your reader would misunderstand what the original source meant. If you omit anything from the original quotation, you need to use ellipsis points (…) in order to show that you are not reproducing the original exactly (Gibaldi 97).

Evaluating Sources

You need to evaluate the sources you are consulting before citing them, because sources aren't all equal in terms of quality or reliability. (For instance, just about anyone could buy a domain and put information up on a website. And if they know about web design, they could make the website look very professional, even if the content is inaccurate.)

Sources you find can be poor for many different reasons—"material may be based on incorrect or outdated information or on poor logic, and the author's knowledge or view of the subject may be biased or too limited" (Gibaldi 33). Whenever you consider a source, you should "[w]eigh what you read against your own knowledge and intelligence as well as against other treatments of the subject. Focus particularly on the *authority*, *accuracy*, and *currency* of the sources" (Gibaldi 34).

In terms of "currency"—you don't want all of your sources to be particularly old, as that suggests you may not be up to date on the current research that is happening on the topic at hand.

In general, you will want to be looking for articles in peer-reviewed journals, as this means the article has passed through other scholars who are knowledgeable about the field before it is published. There is usually also an editorial board for the journal that will review the article and what the peer reviewers have recommended before making a decision about whether it will be published (or whether it needs to be revised in certain ways first, say).

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009. Print.

Hart, Chris. *Writing Your Masters Dissertation: Realizing Your Potential as a Social Scientist*. London: Sage Publications, 2005. Print.

"Primary and Secondary Sources." UC Berkeley Education Psychology Library, 4 Jan. 2013. Web. 25 Oct. 2013. <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/EDP/primary.html>.