Go the Distance
Student life
Episode 5: Using Sources - Charlotte EXTRA

My name's Charlotte Howard. I'm 35 years old and I'm doing an Open Arts and Humanities degree.

There's one final assessment that is called an EMA that gets marked, and that is pretty much like an exam, but in assignment form. The last assignment for the EMA was discussing the prominence of English language and the resistance of the prominence of English language. We had to use an academic text in it, so I did do a lot of searching on the university website: that's quite good for finding source material, and also the books that they gave me. The books were packed with a lot of material that was very useful.

It's very difficult finding an academic text that is actually relevant, especially if you're quite new to the subject and you don't really know what you're searching for.
The Open University has a library online that you can search through, and they gave you specific words that you should search for, like "prominence," "English," "resistance." It came up with hundreds of results!

I decided to focus on one country, and because I decided to focus on South Africa, I did find the South African resources and just pick those out, and then read through them, and sort-of scanned it for key words like "prominence" and "resistance." And I thought that would be quite good, because I've got South African friends, so I can use them as sources as well.

When I was looking for academic texts, I found two or three that I thought would be quite good, and I just got my highlighter out and started going through it, reading it properly, and I read each text two or three times. It was quite difficult to decide which bits of the text to use and which bits were relevant. There were quite a few times when I just wanted to highlight the whole page. It was quite difficult actually, trying to condense it down to within the word count.

I think I have got better at finding source material. I now know which sources are unreliable and which sources are reliable. There were a few times when my tutor told me to avoid Wikipedia; it's not a reliable source, so it was a case of just trying to find the right sources that would be accepted by the university. But the university had a very good guide on what is classed as reliable sources and what isn't.

And I actually discovered that there wasn't much resistance against prominence of English: the English language is global and there are only certain countries that do resist it.

I did discuss it on the forums, and I did discuss it on social media as well, with other students. There were quite a few students who found the same thing as me: they couldn't find any resistance to the prominence of English, which helped ease my mind.

I did use paraphrasing, summarising and quoting all throughout my essay. It can be quite difficult to avoid plagiarism when you come across something that's written really well and you want to say that in your assignment. But the only way to get round that is by quoting it.

I did have quite a bit of trouble deciding which bits to quote and how to paraphrase things, but I spent a lot of time sort-of speaking to my tutors and other students about ways to come around that. Choosing between paraphrasing and summarisation is - you have to decide how much you want to use. If it's a massive, long paragraph, then it probably is better to just summarise it, whereas if it's only one sentence, or a couple of sentences, you can just rephrase it.

I know how to quote people. I know how to quote people who I speak to on a day-to-day basis as well, which is just as important as finding source material that's written, or on the internet.

When I first started doing my degree, I really struggled with referencing. There were certain things that weren't italicised, which should have been, and putting things in bold, when they shouldn't have been in bold, or putting things in the wrong brackets. By last year though, I had found a guide to Harvard referencing, which I sort-of just had that pinned on my laptop, and every time I was trying to reference, I went back to that guide to make sure that it was done in the correct order.