Read the claim. Then read around it.

A field guide to close reading

A useful quotation is more than a sentence that sounds right. Begin with the claim you are trying to understand, then return to the paragraph around it.

Before quoting a sentence, read the paragraph before it and the paragraph after it.

Keep the author's qualifications and exceptions in view. A page number is a way back to the evidence, not a substitute for reading it.

Keep the context. Not just the line.

A field guide to close reading

A quotation can be accurate and still leave something important out. Look for words such as sometimes, unless and in this example before making a broad claim.

Keep each quotation with its page number and a short note about what the surrounding paragraph says.

When two passages seem to disagree, read both before deciding what the document means. A search result is an invitation to inspect the source, not permission to skip it.

Make a path back to the page.

A field guide to close reading

A reading note should help you return to the source later. Separate the words you copy from the thoughts you add, and keep enough information to find the passage again.

Use quotation marks for copied words, and label your own interpretation separately.

If a passage does not answer your question, try a more specific term. If you still cannot find it, leave the question open. This three-page guide is an original demonstration document, not a research paper.