Citation Focus: 3 Ways to Give Emphasis and Enhance Flow

As we have seen, you cite other researchers for a variety of reasons, but chiefly to indicate the source(s) of your information and to provide readers with a resource list. From a writer's perspective, however, citations also offer a strategy for giving emphasis to people or topics and to enhance narrative flow. Specifically, research writers use three primary ways to focus a citation: information prominent, author prominent, and weak author prominent. Unless otherwise indicated, our definitions are adapted from the following reference: Weissberg, R., & Buker, S. (1990). Writing Up Research. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

In an information prominent focus, the information is given priority over the author(s) with the citation at the end of the sentence. An example of information prominent focus: Plagiarism is a mounting concern in higher education and professional circles (Bertram Gallant, 2011; Dee & Jacob, 2010; McCabe, 2005). Information prominent sentences often provide an introduction to a research area in a review of the literature and have citations to several works. You could also use information prominent focus to maintain writing flow and to promote clarity.

In an author prominent focus, the author(s)'s name(s) are placed in the subject position in the sentence. An example of author prominent focus: Nevertheless, Howard (2008) warns faculty against assuming that plagiarism is epidemic. The author prominent focus is often used in a review of the literature after the initial overview sentences or paragraph about a topic. The name of the author is important for building credibility and can help to clarity the findings presented in various studies. If a superscript numbering style is being used, the placement of the citation number will depend on the journal (sometimes is will come at the end of the sentence, other times it will be placed immediately after the author's name.)

In a weak author prominent focus, the names of the authors are not listed in the sentence, but are grouped together as "researchers" or "statisticians" or some other appropriate synonym. An example of weak author prominent: Several researchers have examined the relationship between plagiarism, academic reading, and writing ability, including summarizing... (Howard, 2008; Howard, Serviss, & Rodrigue, 2010; Pennington, 2010). In the weak author prominent focus, it is quite common to have several studies cited, without the researchers' names appearing in the body of the sentence, just in the parenthetical or subscript numbered citation.

In sum, the choices that you make about the appropriate focus -- information prominent, author prominent, and weak author prominent -- will depend on what you are emphasizing at that point in your text and the flow you are trying to create.