

Using Sources & Avoiding Plagiarism

STUDENT GUIDE, Brooklyn College, Writing Across the Curriculum

Citations are an important aspect of developing a web of intellectual work. There are different definitions of plagiarism. Key issue is drawing the line between improper citation and plagiarism. See more, below!

Source

Parts of this mini-lesson were taken from Purdue's OWL website,
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

Information also adapted from web article by Writing Tutorial Services, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. Other parts were written by Michelle Billies (WF, 2011-2012), Marnie Brady (WF, 2011-2012), Anne Donlon (WF 2011-2012), Tahneer Oksman (WF, 2009-2011).

Why do we emphasize citing our sources in academic work?

1) To demonstrate where you find evidence to support your points.

- Academic research and writing centrally focus on the ability to communicate support and evidence for a writer's ideas and arguments.
- Proper citations always make it possible for a reader to find and review the referenced material and therefore lend legitimacy to your evidence (and your arguments).
- In addition, readers may be interested in the sources for reading more on the topic, for pleasure, or for their own research projects.
- Citations also reveal the footprints of your research path, demonstrating the intellectual circuitry, or building blocks, that form the component parts of your synthesis, interpretation, or claim.

2) To give credit and get credit.

- We cite to honor the intellectual work of the researchers and theorists who came before us. As academic researchers and writers, we build on the work of others in our field.
- In the process of writing you may offer new supporting ideas or additional information not found in your research. You may discover a new way of thinking, make a counter-argument, or consider a novel question may about the subject of your research and writing. Just as you seek to cite the work that came before you, you should expect that anyone referring to your published ideas or words will cite you as author.

APA! MLA! CSM! Why So Many?

Different disciplines use citation styles that meet the specific needs of their intellectual work:

- Most **humanities courses** use the **Modern Language Association (MLA)** style guide. MLA citation style highlights *the author* of the source.
- Most **social science courses** use the **American Psychological Association (APA)** style guide. APA citation style calls attention to *the date* of the work.
- Most **history courses** use the **Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)**. The “Chicago” format uses numerical annotations to link uncommon knowledge provided in the text directly to footnotes or endnotes.
- Most **sciences** use the **Council of Science Editors (CSE)** style guide. CSE is similar to the APA style, emphasizing the author and *the date* of the work.

Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism

According to the Brooklyn College Student Handbook, plagiarism is representing the words or ideas of another as one's own work in any academic exercise. Examples include:

- Copying another person's actual works without the use of quotation marks and footnotes attributing the words to their source.
- Presenting another person's ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging the source.
- Using information that is not common knowledge without acknowledging the source.
- Submitting downloaded term papers or parts of term papers, paraphrasing or copying information from the Internet without citing the source, and "cutting and pasting" from various sources without proper attribution. (Page 152)

It is easy to avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism by following the guidelines outlined below. As always, if you have specific questions about whether something is plagiarism or not, please ask your instructor.

1.1 Identify the style before you begin your research:

1. Ask your professor which citation style should be used for the given assignment.
2. Refer to an updated style guide for in-text and Work Cited/Reference format.
3. Stick to one style for your paper—never mix the formats.

1.2 Take proper notes when you conduct your research:

- Bring your style guide to the library, or find one online! You can save yourself time later on if you write down the source information in the format required for the Work Cited or Reference page as you take notes. This practice will ensure you have all the information needed at your finger-tips when you are ready to write the paper.
- If you are using material from the Internet be sure to copy all relevant citation information, including the URL address of the website location. Include the date when you accessed the source.
- Your sources may not all be written; you may want to cite an interview you conducted, or a lecture, a film, or a TV show you watched. Always identify the full name of the speaker, the venue, date, and title as applicable, and consult your style guide for the appropriate citation formatting.
- As you write your notes, be sure to distinguish quotes, paraphrasing, and *your own ideas*! See examples and tips in the next section. Always indicate who made the statement, and be aware that that person may be someone other than the source's author. Write down the page number in your notes!

Part 2. Using Appropriate In-text Citations

2.1 Quotation: Whenever you copy something directly from another text, put it in quotation marks. Also, document the source according to a standard documentation style.

Example: According to Peter S. Pritchard in USA Today, “Public schools need reform but they’re irreplaceable in teaching all the nation’s young” (14).

TIP: Be especially careful to indicate a quotation with quotation marks when you are taking notes during your research, so that you don’t forget and think that you wrote the passage yourself. Check the quotation against the original text to make sure it is completely accurate.

2.2 Paraphrase: Sometimes you want to state another person’s ideas, but in your own words. You must still acknowledge the source of the information. Be sure you aren’t just rearranging or replacing a few words.

Example: Peter S. Pritchard, writing in USA Today, emphasizes the importance of public education but suggests that it could be improved (14).

TIP: Check your paraphrase against the original text to be sure you have not accidentally used the same phrases or words, and that the information is accurate. Careful, reversing the clauses in the original changes the emphasis. Remember that the source of each idea you use must be cited separately; it’s not enough to simply refer to an author once if you have used his or her ideas throughout your paper.

TIP: Read over what you want to paraphrase carefully and then cover up or close the text so you aren’t tempted to use the text as a “guide.” Write out the idea in your own words without peeking.

TIP: You can also employ a combination of paraphrase and selective quotation.

Example: Public schools face many challenges, a point made by Peter S. Pritchard writing in USA Today, who also emphasized that schools are “irreplaceable in teaching all the nation’s young” (14).

2.3 Common Knowledge: You do not need to document the source of facts that can be found in numerous places and are likely to be known by a lot of people.

Example: John F. Kennedy was elected President of the United States in 1960.

However, you *must* document facts that are not generally known.

Example: Kennedy was elected by a margin of only 0.2%, according to the website of the National Archives.

You must also cite interpretations of facts made by specific people.

Example: In his book, JFK, Bill Hagen argues that John F. Kennedy was elected President because the American people were hungry for change (6).

This is not a fact but an interpretation; consequently, you need to cite your source.

TIP: When in doubt, ask yourself if what you are saying is agreed on by many readily-available sources. If so, it is common knowledge. If the information is disputable, then your readers will want to know where you are getting that version of the facts and therefore you need to cite your source.

