

Plagiarism



What is plagiarism?

Using other people's words, ideas and concepts, or images in your writing without referencing them or their work in the form of a citation.

Why is avoiding plagiarism important in the university?

Universities place great value on taking ownership of our ideas. Think of it this way—if you discovered a cancer treatment, you wouldn't want someone else publishing an article using your results without citing you. You'd want to say, "Hey! That was me! I did that!" By properly citing, you are giving credit to others for their work. Many professors are asked to do research as part of their job. Getting their work published and having others cite their work are the main ways that these professors are acknowledged for their research.

Good researchers want to be able to make sure the research they're reading is based on sound evidence and reasoning. They can't tell if the evidence and reasoning is sound if they don't know where it came from—citations do most of this work.

Why do successful writers cite sources?

By citing others, you are able to do the following in your writing:

- Join an ongoing conversation between scholars on the topic at hand.
- Demonstrate the reliability of your own claims and show readers who else has informed your thinking.
- Offer your readers some resources to check out if they wish to research your topic more themselves.

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When should I use quotation marks when citing a source?

You should surround any words, phrases, lines or passages that you take word-for-word from your source with quotation marks.

What if I paraphrase an author's work into my own words? Is that still plagiarism?

A paraphrase is defined by the Purdue OWL as "your own rendition of essential information and ideas expressed by someone else, presented in a new form." If you paraphrase an author's work without citing them then yes, that is still plagiarism. You are still using another person's ideas.

You need to be careful about *how* you are paraphrasing. Do not simply flip around the sentence or change two words (if you would like examples of how to properly paraphrase, please refer to the handout entitled *Using Sources*). Really think about how you can effectively summarize the concept that the author is discussing using your own writing voice.

Do you have any advice on how I can properly paraphrase?

- Cover up or close the text so that you can't see any of it and won't be tempted to use it as a "guide" when you are paraphrasing.
- Imagine how you might verbally explain the idea you are paraphrasing to member of your audience (your professor, your classmates, etc.).

I just need to cite words or ideas from an outside source, right?

Nope. Graphs, tables, pictures and videos all need to be cited.

Do I have to cite a fact that is common knowledge?

No. For example, you don't need to provide a citation when you state that the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776. However, be cautious as to what you consider common knowledge. For example, statistics and statements of fact may not be agreed upon by everyone, so be as thorough as you can in your research.

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Are there ways to figure out if something is common knowledge?

The general rule is that if you see the same fact or idea provided in several different sources and those sources don't include a citation for that fact or idea, then that fact or idea is common knowledge.

The other consideration is that common knowledge changes based on who is writing. A scholar who has been practicing in the field for a long time is assumed to have more common knowledge than a student taking an introductory course on the same subject matter. So, think about your classmates or peers when you try to decide whether something is common knowledge or not. If you are confused, ask your professor what he/she would define as common knowledge in your course.

If you don't have time to ask someone about common knowledge and one of your sources, go ahead and provide a citation. It's better to over-cite than to leave out a needed citation. We urge you to ask us or your professor because one way to show your reader that you are skilled with citation is by showing them that you know what to cite and what not to cite.

Do you have any other tips for how to avoid plagiarism?

Yes! Most writers who plagiarize do so either because they do not stay organized while they write or because they don't understand how citation works and what needs to be cited. Consider the following advice:

- Take good notes while you are researching.
- If you are copying word-for-word from a source, put the phrase in quotation marks.
- If you are not copying word for word from the source, still write down the page number where you found that concept.
- Check out our handouts and manuals on *MLA*, *APA*, or *Chicago* citation styles.
- If you need additional explanation, don't hesitate to make an appointment with us!