5.3: Citing Sources

Citing Sources Accurately, Avoiding Plagiarism, and Creating a Final Research Project

By using the references page and in-text citations of research articles, Karen was able to scout out even more helpful information on her topic. She learned the value of those in-text citations and lists of works consulted when she was reading something interesting and wanted to learn more. When an article cited the name of the original source’s author, title, publication information, and direct online link, she was able to go to the original source and dive deeper into the information she was passionate about learning. She also reviewed her syllabus, the formatting and documentation style it indicated, and the style guides themselves.

Every publisher, profession, and academic discipline has its own style guide, which provides standards, expectations, and guidelines for formatting written work, for documenting research, whether read or conducted, and for citing outside sources that help inform readers and other potential writers. Publishers and professors expect written work (i.e., essays and reports) to meet the standards set in these style guides. Information about the five most important, most common style guides used in academic disciplines can be found in the Further Resources box at the end of this chapter.

A research-based essay that conforms to the conventions of a style guide signals to the reader that the writer has joined the academic conversation and should be taken seriously. It also indicates the writer’s respect for the thoughts and ideas of others. In addition, the reader learns where to go to find other information on the topic. When writers do not turn in a research paper with the correct format, it is analogous to showing up in board shorts to a job interview.
Citation Management

While using a style guide requires attention to detail, the process can be simplified by using a variety of free tools that help students make a Works Cited (in MLA) or References (in APA) page. For example, many students use an add-on for Google Docs called EasyBib Bibliography Creator, or Zotero, a free online tool to help students to organize research materials into academic formats.

Another tool is BibMe: Free Bibliography & Citation Maker, and even Purdue OWL offers generator options.

While these tools make many of the tasks of conforming to a style guide easier, students should always check the final outcome with the style guides themselves because the order in which the citation is generated often comes out wrong for various reasons, often because of the way in which the information was entered. It is important for writers to double-check for little “errors” in punctuation and capitalization. Sometimes the generator places titles inaccurately in ALL CAPS. Sometimes hyphens are placed where dashes should be. If the quotation marks and apostrophes are in a serif font in the body of the essay, writers need to be sure the quotation marks and apostrophes look the same in the references section.

Using Sources Correctly

Karen found 15 different sources she could use for her 10-page analytical report for her psychology class. She discovered that only nine were fully credible and appropriate for the topic and for college-level writing. In contrast, Jaden went with the first two sources that popped up in his internet search and copied and pasted paragraphs from the sources directly into his document. In addition, he promptly forgot where he got the information and what the title of each was called. He did not notice if there were author names or publication dates. He did not know what form the list of sources at the end of the paper should be in. All of these oversights lessened the quality of his work. Plagiarism (i.e., using the words and ideas of another writer without proper attribution) could cause Jaden to receive a failing grade for his essay and perhaps be grounds for suspension.

Annotations and Citations: Be Accurate and Precise

Karen consulted various free online guides to ensure that her in-text citations and list of works cited were correct and complete. Jaden had missed this significant information when it had been presented in class. When he had that unfortunate required meeting with his professor regarding his plagiarized essay, the fact that he did not understand the importance of this element in the process of crafting his essay was a glaring concern. Was it one that was fixable within his essay at this point in the semester? Not likely.

Annotation: The Basics

It is important to take notes when researching, and to accurately use credible sources. When deep-diving into the information written by others, be sure to take accurate notes, indicating the following:

- Whether the source material borrowed is verbatim (i.e., copied word for word) or paraphrased and summarized (i.e.,
rewritten in one’s own words)

- The page number and paragraph number, if identifiable, from which the information came
- The publication information required for the citation at the end in the style that the professor requires

For MLA-style papers, information such as the author’s first and last name, the title of the article, title of the book, publication, magazine, or webpage, publication volume, number, or series, name of the publisher, publication date, and URL, DOI, or link (if the source is online) are all required.

Note: MLA uses the word “Accessed” to denote the date on which the information on the web was obtained. However, for the newest edition MLA 8, it is not required to add this information at the end of the Works Cited entry, but it is especially encouraged when there is no copyright date listed on a website.

Helpful Annotation Tools

Besides paper, index cards or sticky notes, there are various other methods and software applications (apps) with which to organize source citations, quotations, paraphrases, and summaries, along with one’s own ideas and outlines. These include Microsoft Onenote, Evernote, and EndNote.

Documentation and Citation

To use sources correctly and appropriately, give appropriate credit following the sentence, paragraph, or general area that uses outside source information.

For MLA style, use in-text citations following direct quotes, paraphrasing, or summarizing, with author(s) last name(s) and page numbers (if available) within parentheses. (The information in the in-text citation will be whatever the first word is in the Works Cited entry. For that reason, it can be easier to add in in-text citations after the Works Cited page has been created.)

For example, see the following:

“The opioid epidemic has expanded exponentially in the past five years” (McKenna 5).

Or, if using a signal phrase, the in-text citation will be like this:

The opioid epidemic has expanded exponentially in the past five years” (5).

For APA style, writers use the author(s) last name(s) followed by a comma and the year of publication.

“The opioid epidemic has expanded exponentially in the past five years” (McKenna, 2018).

Essentially, all individuals deserve credit for their hard work. But even more important is the fact the student’s own ideas, as expressed through writing, are what professors look for. The student’s words should be informed by the research, not usurped by it. Since the grade one earns is based on the value of the content and how it is communicated through the written word, it’s the student’s voice that matters to the professor. So writers should supplement and support the original
content by incorporating outside sources through quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, or paraphrasing, following each instance with in-text citations.

**Quote.** To repeat or copy a group of words from a document or speech, typically with an indication that one is not the original author or speaker. Quotes work well when the material is difficult to paraphrase in a unique way.

**Paraphrase.** To express the meaning of something written or spoken using different words, especially to achieve greater clarity.

**Summarize.** To give a brief statement of the main points of something longer.

An important thing to remember about quoting is that sometimes the material a writer would like to borrow directly is longer than four lines of typed text. If this is the case, writers will need to use something called an "extract," sometimes referred to as a "block quote." In an extract or block quote, the quotation marks are removed from the quoted material, and the entire section being quoted is indented one tab from the left-hand margin. Note that in this case the period goes before the in-text citation.

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**A Word About “Drive-By” Citations**

Another strategy some writers use is what some educators call “drive-by” citations. These are references to a work that make a very quick appearance. Then the student writer moves on without discussing the connection between the student’s work and the ideas in the citation. This kind of incorporation of the words or ideas of others is to be avoided as it adds little value.

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**The List at the End of the Paper**

To use sources correctly, it’s also critically important to give appropriate credit in a list at the end of any college research paper. There are a variety of names and titles for these lists, depending on the style and style guides.

**Works Cited (MLA).** A Works Cited list is an alphabetical list of works cited, or sources specifically referenced in the body of the paper. All works that have been quoted or paraphrased should be included. Works read but not referenced in the body of the paper should be left off this list.

**References (APA).** A References list is similar to a Works Cited list; this is the term used when citing sources using APA (American Psychological Association) style. The page should be titled “References” and arranged alphabetically by author last name.

**Bibliography (APA).** A Bibliography lists all the material consulted in preparing an essay, whether the essay has actually referred to and cited the work or not.

**Annotated Bibliography.** An annotated bibliography is a list of citations of books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph—the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.
Notes

Using notes and bibliography is preferred by those writing within the humanities, including literature, history, and the arts. With this approach, sources are cited in numbered footnotes or endnotes. Each note corresponds to a superscript (raised) numeral within the document. Sources are also usually listed in a separate bibliography.

The author-date approach is more common in the sciences and social sciences. With this approach, sources are briefly cited in the document, usually in parentheses, by author last name and year of publication. Each in-text citation matches up with an entry in a Reference list, where full bibliographic information is provided.

Plagiarism, Ethics, and Academic Integrity

When Jaden was being reprimanded by his professor, he did not understand what he had done wrong. He had copied and pasted text before, and his high school teachers had not noticed. Now he could lose the ability to complete his other courses, if he was expelled from college. He could even lose the opportunity to return to the campus for any future pursuits. He requested help, and the Professor and Dean sent him to the College Writing Center for additional tutoring on research methods and academic integrity, and to the Learning Center for mentoring and counseling about time management, prioritization, and focus. As a new writing tutor, Karen helped Jaden to read and annotate the syllabus information on academic integrity, plagiarism, and online resources for research.

Academic honesty is fundamental in a college environment. It is essential for academic writers to understand the ethical use of other people’s words and ideas. College instructors expect students to fulfill their academic obligations through honest and independent effort. Students need to demonstrate academic integrity: the respectful and truthful attribution of credit to those who have provided words and ideas that are used in research assignments. The reason that plagiarism is treated seriously at the college is that it is seen as an academic crime or simply cheating.

Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism

Research writing should present a writer’s thinking, supported and illuminated by the thinking and writing of others. Distinguishing between the two is paramount to academic integrity. Desperate students sometimes purchase an essay from a website and submit it as original course work. More often, writers plagiarize due to sloppiness, haste or ignorance. To avoid unintentional plagiarism, writers need to do the following:

- Understand what types of information must be cited
- Understand what constitutes fair use of a source
- Keep source materials and notes carefully organized
- Distinguish what information is composed of facts or general statements that are common knowledge

What is Common knowledge? Common knowledge is a fact or general statement that is commonly known. For example, a writer would not need to cite the statement that fruit juices contain sugar; this is well known and well-documented. However, if a writer explained the differences between the chemical structures of the glucose molecule and how sugar is related to today’s levels of obesity in America, a citation would be necessary. When in doubt, cite.

https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Composition/Introductory_Composition/Book%3A_English_Composition_-_Connect…
Updated: Sun, 23 Aug 2020 03:48:40 GMT
Powered by
What is Fair Use? Writers are allowed to quote, paraphrase, or summarize material from previously published works without formally obtaining the copyright holder’s permission. The concept of “fair use” means that writers may legitimately use brief excerpts from source material to support and develop their own ideas. For instance, a journalist might excerpt a few lines from a recently released film when writing a movie review. However, quoting or paraphrasing another’s work at excessive length, to the extent that large sections of the writing are unoriginal, is not fair use.

The 70/30 and 15% Rules: The 70/30 Rule says that approximately 70% of the written content should be original words and ideas from the student writer, with up to 30% from outside sources. The 15% Rule is that student writers should never use more than 15% of direct quotes from sources. If the writing goes over this amount, the voice of the student is not strong enough.

Value Your Own Voice

Plagiarism is the result of students who lack confidence in their ability to communicate in writing. It also frequently happens because students have not yet mastered the college success skills of time management, prioritization, and focus. In addition, some students value the ethos and authority of the writing of experts, even at the cost of valuing their own words, phrasing, and ideas. They may be afraid to say things in their own way. But college is partly about students finding their own voices and building confidence in communicating. Students remember that quotes and sources shouldn’t drive their papers. Their own original ideas should.

Here are two techniques one could use to avoid plagiarism when researching and writing using sources:

- After reading and annotating a research report, put it aside. Without looking at it, freewrite a summary.
- Only use direct quotes when a source’s original words provide a unique and critical perspective that can’t be paraphrased or briefly summarized.

A Note About Time Management While Researching

Students make time for research in order to develop important college success skills. When professors introduce writing assignments based on research, they hope that students will be excited about their potential topics. Professors encourage students to start researching as soon as possible, so they see what problems rise to the surface: What sources have already been written about the topic? Who is studying and writing about the same area? What makes that individual, researcher, and expert worth listening to? And what gives their work authority and credibility?

Some college students vastly underestimate the time needed to conduct the kind of research that gives them expertise on a topic. Those with lower grades have often simply not planned, nor have they spent enough time immersing themselves in the research process and content so they can become more knowledgeable or “expert” on the field. This is often when plagiarizing happens. Time management is essential.

Activities

- Put away a plagiarized essay and tell the instructor or peer mentor what you wrote, recalling your ideas in your own words (mentioning a source or two as appropriate). You talk; the instructor or peer mentor types. Then review what was typed and see how powerful and effective your own words were. You should gain increased confidence in your
own voice and ability to communicate.

- Take out two highlighters and draw through your own words with one color, and through information from an outside source with another color. Learn to recognize how much of the content is your own, and learn the 70/30 Rule.

Further Resources

For each of these styles, a link to a free online guide from Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (OWL) is provided. Should the links to specific pages change, please search the The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

“MLA (Modern Language Association): The arts and humanities.” The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.


“Associated Press (AP): Journalism such as magazines and newspapers.” The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

“American Medical Association (AMA): Medicine, health, and biological sciences.” The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.