



Academic Support Center

Documenting Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism

Academic writing comes with its own set of responsibilities. When you write for college classes, there are very specific rules for documenting the sources of your ideas and supporting your own ideas in your work. In academic writing, your own ideas and conclusions are just as important as the sources you use to support theories and conclusions in your work. Just as a paper full of only someone else's ideas would be unacceptable, a paper with only your own ideas and no supporting evidence would carry no weight in a college setting. Most importantly, you must be aware that the use of ideas, analysis, theories, or studies from sources without proper citation constitutes plagiarism, and this is a very serious offense.

Source: Anything that someone else has created that you have used to gather information for your writing. Sources include books, journals or magazines, articles, internet sites, newspaper articles, web pages, interviews, television programs, tables, corporate brochures, annual reports, songs, movies, research studies, and surveys.

Documentation: The process of recording where you got your idea or information (in text, footnotes, bibliography, quotation marks, indirect quotes). Documentation comes from the idea of providing documents to authenticate research. When you are writing a paper, one very important way to show the strength of your ideas is to provide supporting information from other sources and experts in the area you are writing about.

Common Knowledge: Information everyone knows or could find out easily from many sources. Common knowledge is standard information on a subject that can be found in many different sources as well as common sense observations. Standard information includes major facts about a topic, such as the date of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo or the names of the generals who fought in the battle. Standard information does not, however, include interpretations of facts, such as a historian's opinion about the effect of Napoleon's relationship with his officers or an author's analysis of the key mistakes Napoleon made. Standard information would include a list of the symptoms of AIDS but not an author's discussion of the societal conditions that have led to a spread of the disease.

Common knowledge also encompasses common sense observations or something that most people know. For example, we can all agree that inflation is most troublesome for people with low and fixed incomes. This type of observation would not need to be cited, but an economist's argument about the effects of inflation on garment workers in New York City would need to be cited.

NOTE: If you are unsure whether a piece of information you are using is common knowledge, provide a citation for that source as you would for any other borrowed material.

Citation: A reference in your paper that indicates the source of words or ideas you are using as support. You must provide references for the source of any work quoted or paraphrased in the body of your paper. Types of citation styles include MLA, APA, and Chicago. Each style requires a reference within the paper that provides enough information to link it to the full bibliographic information listed on your Works Cited page (MLA), Reference page (APA), or Bibliography (Chicago). For specific formats of these references, consult a handbook. It is important to remember that noting a source at the end of your paper is not sufficient; you must provide a citation at the point of use within your paper if you quote or paraphrase source material.

You are required to cite a source when you include the following:

- an original idea derived from a source, whether it is quoted or paraphrased
- your summary of an author's idea, analysis, theory, or study
- factual information that is not common knowledge, such as statistics
- any exact wording copied from a source

You are not required to cite in these instances:

- your own ideas, observations, experiences, analysis, or conclusions
- original experiments or survey results
- common knowledge

Paraphrasing: Putting the thoughts of other authors' ideas in your words by changing the wording and the structure of the original text. A citation must still be used with the paraphrased sentence to acknowledge the other author's intellectual property, thoughts, and ideas. If you do not cite an idea you have paraphrased, this is considered plagiarism.

Original text: *The most effective way to write a paraphrase is to read the original passage, put the passage aside, and then compose your own restatement of the materials in the passage (Rosen, 2006).*

ACCEPTABLE paraphrases:

One recommended method for paraphrasing is to read the text of interest, step away from the materials, and later restate the materials in your own words (Rosen, 2006).

Rosen (2006) recommends that paraphrasing is easier to do if you read a sentence from a text, set the text aside, then write the author's idea out in your own words.

UNACCEPTABLE paraphrase:

The best way to write a paraphrase is to read the source passage, put it aside, and then write your own statement of the ideas in the original (Rosen, 2006).

This example is unacceptable because the wording of the paraphrase is too close to the wording of the original. It is important to completely change the wording and the sentence structure when paraphrasing an original source in order to avoid plagiarism.

Plagiarism: (from a Latin word for "kidnapper") The presentation of someone's ideas or words as your own, the uncited use of another's work.

Plagiarism can be deliberate:

- Copying or downloading a phrase, a sentence, or a longer passage from a source and passing it off as your own by leaving out quotation marks and a source citation.
- Handing in as your own a paper you bought, copied, had a friend write, or downloaded from the Internet.
- Summarizing or paraphrasing someone else's ideas without citing the source

Plagiarism can be accidental:

- Forgetting to place quotation marks around another writer's words
- Omitting a source citation from a paraphrase because of carelessness
- Omitting a source citation for another's idea because you are unaware of the need to acknowledge the idea

IMPORTANT: Whether deliberate or accidental, plagiarism is an offense with serious consequences. The uncited use of another's work is theft of ideas and can result in many unpleasant consequences from embarrassment to expulsion.

ACCORDING TO THE RIVIER UNIVERSITY HANDBOOK:

Plagiarism and cheating are serious breaches of academic honesty. In general, plagiarism is defined as the presentation of someone else's work in whatever form: copyrighted material, notes, film, art work, reports, statistics, bibliographies, and the like, as one's own, and failing to acknowledge the true source. Quoting word-for-word, or almost so, or using the argumentation of another source without acknowledging this dependence also constitutes plagiarism. Cheating is defined as the giving or attempting to give or to receive unauthorized information or assistance during an examination or in completing an assigned project. Submission of a single work for two separate courses without the permission of the instructors involved is also a form of cheating.

If students are unsure whether a specific course of action would constitute plagiarism or cheating, they should consult with their instructor in advance.

Penalties for plagiarism and cheating vary with the degree of the offense and may take the form of the following academic sanctions:

- the grade of F for the work in question;
- the grade of F for the course;
- notification of the divisional dean and/or Associate Vice President for Student Success of the misconduct of the students;
- recommendations that the student be suspended or dismissed from the University.

PLAGIARISM EXAMPLES

Original text from page 12 of Elaine Tyler May's essay "Myths and Realities of the American Family" written in 2007.

Because women's wages often continue to reflect the fiction that men earn the family wage, single mothers rarely earn enough to support themselves and their children adequately. And because work is still organized around the assumption that mothers stay home with children, even though few mothers can afford to do so, child-care facilities in the United States remain woefully inadequate.

Student Version A:

Since women's wages often continue to reflect the mistaken notion that men are the main wage earners in the family, single mothers rarely make enough to support themselves and their children very well. Also, because work is still based on the assumption that mothers stay home with children, facilities for child care remain woefully inadequate in the United States (May, 2007).

Plagiarism: Even though the writer has provided a citation here, there is too much direct borrowing in sentence structure and wording here. The writer has changed a few words, dropped one phrase, and added some new language, but the overall text too closely resembles May's.

Student Version B:

By and large, our economy still operates on the mistaken notion that men are the main breadwinners in the family. Thus, women continue to earn lower wages than men. This means, in effect, that many single mothers cannot earn a decent living. Furthermore, adequate day care is not available in the United States because of the mistaken assumption that mothers remain at home with their children.

Plagiarism: This shows good paraphrasing of wording and sentence structure, but May's original ideas are not acknowledged. Some of May's points are common knowledge (women earn less than men, many single mothers live in poverty), but May uses this common knowledge to make a specific and original point, and her original conception of this idea must be indicated with a citation.

Student Version C:

Women today still earn less than men - so much less that many single mothers and their children live near or below the poverty line. May (2007) argues that this situation stems in "the fiction that men earn the family wage" (p.12). May further suggests that the American workplace still operates on the assumption that mothers with children stay home to care for them.

No Plagiarism: The writer makes use of the common knowledge in May's work, but acknowledges May's original conclusion and does not incorporate it as his or her own. The quotation is properly cited, as is a later paraphrase of another of May's ideas.