

Guide to Academic Honesty

You are part of the academic conversation.

Conversations about most any topic you can imagine are going on all around us, but we do not notice them because they are generally happening in print, in journals and books held in academic libraries around the world. By enrolling in college and taking a class, you are signaling your desire to enter into some of these conversations. You are of course most welcome to join in, but because students enter these conversations mostly by writing papers for classes, those instructors and students already conversing will expect you to follow their established customs.

Plagiarism, put simply, is willfully misrepresenting yourself in these conversations by suggesting that certain words or ideas are your own when they are not. You avoid plagiarism by understanding and following the citation conventions of the discipline within which you are writing. Citation conventions were developed by professors and teachers to help people find the original sources of ideas and information discussed in academia; citations record what has gone before in the conversation. Failure to acknowledge this history in your own writing is plagiarism.

There are certainly degrees of plagiarism, from an innocent overly-close paraphrase of another author's words to an entire paper cravenly downloaded from an internet cheating site. Also, intentions do matter in deciding what constitutes plagiarism and what is simply an error in citation conventions: students do sometimes fail to cite or use quotation marks purely from carelessness or lack of understanding. Still, ultimately your writing must speak for itself, and you will be judged by what you submit as your own work. Pleading ignorance will not protect you from having to face the same consequences as the student who willfully cheats. The following information is therefore designed to help you avoid both unintentional plagiarism and the temptations and frustrations that lead to intentional plagiarism.

For guidance on citation and usage, visit the Swirbul Library website:
http://libguides.adelphi.edu/citation_style/citationguide

Understanding the Disciplines

Be aware of specific expectations of your school or major.

The University is divided into a number of schools, colleges, divisions and departments, each with its own research methods, formal conventions, and ideas about how best to use sources. Three areas are traditionally recognized: **sciences** (chemistry, biology, physics), **social sciences** (anthropology, sociology, economics), **humanities** (philosophy, history, English) and **arts** (music, sculpture, theatre). There are also **professional schools** (social work, nursing, business) that use many of the methodologies of the social sciences but have as their aim professional development and training.

These divisions are important to understand because you will find yourself writing very different kinds of papers as you take classes in the various areas. Expectations for uses of evidence will vary, as will

conventions for incorporating and citing sources. In the sections that follow, pay close attention to remarks made in reference to one or the other of the divisions.

Quotation, Paraphrase, Summary

It is crucial that you respect the work of others.

Depending on the purpose a source plays in your writing, you will offer your reader more or less information about the author, context, and specific language. There are three ways to incorporate a source's ideas into your writing: **quotation**, **paraphrase**, and **summary**.

Quotation:

Reproduces the author's exact language, word for word, within quotation marks.

Paraphrase:

Reproduces author's idea and argument in about the same amount of space as the original, but in your own words and your own sentence structure.

Summary:

Represents an overall argument in a much more compact space in your own words.

When to Quote

Contrary to popular belief, overusing quotations suggests to your reader that you have *not* really understood what you have read, and that you have simply copied material to make it seem as if you have read carefully.

Discipline-specific note

Generally in the sciences and social sciences, paraphrases and summaries are preferred, though a quotation of a few words is useful for borrowing particularly apt phrasing or technical language. In the humanities, quotations are more welcome, particularly when the actual words of the writer are important to your argument (such as in philosophy, where entire arguments can turn on the use of one word over another).

In any case, do not overuse quotations by quoting either very long or numerous passages. A good summary or paraphrase is often more effective than a quotation to demonstrate to your readers that you have a good grasp of the material you have read.

How to Paraphrase

As students you present your results and ideas through writing; it is crucial that you respect the work of others by learning to paraphrase and summarize correctly, without misrepresenting either the *ideas* or the *writing* of others as your own.

Students often assume that paraphrasing means “changing enough words” to avoid plagiarism. But this is precisely the wrong approach. If you ask “have I changed the source enough to avoid plagiarism?” you have misunderstood the point of using sources. The point of paraphrasing is to explain another person’s ideas clearly to your reader. Instead of making changes in the original sentence until you are not plagiarizing, begin by closing your book and writing what *you understand* the source to be saying. This strategy also ensures that, when you paraphrase and summarize, you actually understand the ideas you are using, which is the whole point of the exercise.

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Introducing and Discussing Sources

Learn how to avoid unintentional plagiarism.

Incorporating sources is not just about citing correctly, but also about clearly assigning ideas and opinions to their owners. The best way to avoid unintentional plagiarism is to introduce a source *before* a quotation, paraphrase or summary, and then to indicate clearly where the source’s ideas or information ends and where your own ideas begin.

While some inexperienced writers fear that introducing sources will break the “flow” of their writing, the opposite is true—good writing clearly signals how the various sources of information fit together, while choppy writing jumps from source to source without signals.

Some Examples of Incorporating Sources

The following two passages are nearly identical; for each one, determine which information and opinions are from the President’s Council and which are the author’s:

Prior to Title IX, about 300,000 young women participated in national interscholastic sports (President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sport, 1997). Looking back, we can now assume that this number is much lower than it should have been and did not reflect the desires of the many girls not allowed to play.

Prior to Title IX, about 300,000 young women participated in national interscholastic sports, a number which, according to the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sport (1997), is much lower than it should be and did not reflect the desires of the many girls not allowed to play.

Notice that these two passages say very different things. While both report a statistic of 300,000 women in sports, in the first it is clear that the evaluation of the number is the author’s, while in the second the evaluation was part of the President’s Council report. It takes very little work to make this clear: the key phrases are “looking back” in the first example, and “according to” in the second.

Students often cite by simply putting a parenthetical reference at the end of any paragraph with a paraphrase or summary in it, believing that this is adequate. But such a method can lead to suspicions of plagiarism if it is not clear which ideas are borrowed and which are the writer's. Consider the paragraph below, in which the only citation information is at the very end. [The following examples are adapted from Coulton, C.J. (2005). The Place of Community in Social Work Practice Research: Conceptual and Methodological Developments. *Social Work Research*, 29, 73-86.]

Another approach to defining communities uses geographic information systems (GIS) to identify patterns of intersecting pedestrian streets deemed to be areas of social interactions. These natural breaks represent boundaries across which social interaction diminishes. GIS can be used to examine hypotheses about space and social organization and to define community units for further analysis. The use of GIS tools to uncover socially meaningful boundaries can make community research more authentic, accurate, and replicable. By examining residents' perceptions, street intersections, and geographic attributes, the researcher can link social, economic, and behavioral data (Grattis, 1998).

Here it is impossible to know for certain what information and conclusions came from Grattis, and which are the writer's. But only a few small changes are needed to clarify where the source's information ends and the author's voice begins:

Another approach to defining communities uses geographic information systems (GIS) to identify patterns of intersecting pedestrian streets deemed to be areas of social interaction. Grannis (1998) demonstrated that these natural breaks represent boundaries across which social interaction diminishes. He has used GIS to examine hypotheses about space and social organization and to define community units for further analysis. One can conclude that such use of GIS tools to uncover socially meaningful boundaries can make community research more authentic, accurate, and replicable. By examining residents' perceptions, street intersections, and geographic attributes, the researcher can link social, economic, and behavioral data.

Here, the simple phrase "One can conclude" clearly marks the end of the summary of the source and the beginning of the student's evaluation of that source.

Discipline-specific note

While all disciplines require clearly introducing and discussing sources, the sciences and social sciences require reporting statistics and other simple points of fact more often than do the humanities. Such information can often be cited simply in parentheses and without elaborate introduction, since it is obvious that the writer had to look up the information someplace.

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What to Cite?

Know what type of information to cite and what is an authoritative source.

One key to avoiding plagiarism is to know what you need to cite and what you do not. A good rule of thumb: if in doubt, cite it. But there are some other basic principles to keep in mind.

Citing Common Knowledge

You do not need to cite information that is widely known or easily accessible in basic reference books. So, you do not cite a source for the fact that the Declaration of Independence was written in 1776, nor do you need a page number reference for its well-known opening words (“When in the course of human events...”). But if you were to go on to discuss something more subjective, such as the colonial public’s reaction to its publishing, you would need to cite your sources.

Citing Study Aids and Websites

Many students are reluctant to cite study aids (CliffsNotes, SparkNotes), online reference tools (Wikipedia), and other websites and blogs. This attitude is understandable if you are trying to conceal from your instructor that you have used such resources, but be aware that such deception leads to plagiarism. Any resources you use to spark your imagination or inspire you must be cited even if you are embarrassed to have used them. It is not enough simply to include websites in a bibliography; the body of your text must indicate clearly what ideas are from the resource *and how your own thinking was affected by those ideas*. Students sometimes say that they cannot remember which ideas they had before they started reading and which were suggested by the resources themselves, but this excuse will not do. A responsible writer keeps track of such things and represents the source of ideas accurately in the work.

But more importantly, be aware that your instructors actually *value* the ability to use resources for inspiration responsibly. Your paper will be well-received if you demonstrate that you are able to use the ideas of others to develop new ideas. You therefore strengthen, not weaken, your paper by visibly incorporating your sources. One suggestion for doing this well: rather than reporting the ideas of the sources as simply true, use contrastive words to link your ideas to those of your sources while simultaneously showing where your thinking has advanced. Consider the constructions of the following:

Beowulf can be classified as an epic poem because of its length and its status as an early work in the language (Wikipedia); however, we might ask whether this category is in fact a good fit for this folkloric tale.

There has been some question whether Davy Crockett died in action at the Alamo or was executed after being captured. Discussion of this question by amateur

historians on an Alamo enthusiasts' website offers no credible conclusions (The Alamo Site), but does suggest that what is at stake is less what “really” happened and more about our popular definition of bravery.

Using popular resources like Wikipedia and blogs on the internet can be fine as long as they are properly cited, and as long as they are not confused with authoritative academic resources.

Citation Styles

Each course may require a specific citation style.

A citation style is merely a set of conventions established by a particular professional academic organization to make providing references simple and clear. The goal of any citation style is consistency, but each has its own idiosyncrasies that must learned. Three of the most popular, and their official style guides, are

- MLA: Modern Language Association, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*
- APA: American Psychiatric Association, *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*
- CMS or Chicago: University of Chicago Press, *Chicago Manual of Style*

While these official style guides are the only place to get the full details for every citation situation and for answers to specific questions about formatting in each style, all three have been summarized in a number of handbooks and websites. **Unfortunately, not all summaries are accurate or up-to-date, so you will find inconsistencies on various websites, in various books, and even among your own instructors, who may well modify one of these styles for their own classroom use.**

As noted, Adelphi's library website provides links to summaries of the three styles above (http://libguides.adelphi.edu/citation_style/citationguide). But if you are ever in doubt about what citation style to use, simply ask your instructor.

Correcting Myths and Misconceptions

Separate fact from myth to avoid questions of integrity.

- *Paraphrasing does not relieve you of the responsibility to cite.* Paraphrases and summaries require page references and bibliography entries, just like quotations do.
- *Study aids must be cited.* Many students are reluctant to cite study aids (CliffsNotes, SparkNotes), online reference tools (Wikipedia), and other websites and blogs. But even resources you use just to spark your imagination or inspire you must be cited.

- *A web address is not adequate citation.* A web address (e.g., www.adelphi.edu) is virtually never acceptable as a parenthetical in-text citation, nor will a web address alone suffice in a bibliography.
- *Quotations do not make your paper look better.* Contrary to popular belief, overusing quotations suggests to your reader that you have *not* really understood what you have read, and that you have simply copied material to make it seem as if you have read carefully.
- *Introducing quotations does not break the flow.* While some inexperienced writers fear that introducing sources will break the “flow” of their writing, the opposite is true: good writing clearly signals how the various sources of information fit together, while choppy writing jumps from source to source without signals.
- *When in doubt, cite.* While common knowledge need not be referenced, there are gray areas. If you’re not sure whether to cite something, play it safe and cite it.

Resources

For more information, please contact

The Writing Center

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