

Lesson: Strategies to Prevent Plagiarism



Common Knowledge

You do not have to document everything. You do not have to document sources when you are discussing your own experiences, observations, or reactions. Also, you do not have to document facts that are common knowledge.

Examples of common knowledge include:

- John Adams was our second president.
- The United States Bill of Rights consists of the ten amendments added to the Constitution in 1791.



If you see a fact in three or more sources, and you are fairly certain your readers already know this information, it is likely to be “common knowledge.” But when in doubt, cite!

When you borrow from the work of others, use these three strategies:

- Quoting
- Paraphrasing
- Summarizing

Quotations are the exact words of an author, copied directly from a source, word for word. Quotations must be cited!

Use quotation marks when:

- You want to add the power of an author’s words to support your argument.
- You want to disagree with an author’s argument.
- You want to highlight particularly powerful phrases or passages.
- You are comparing and contrasting specific points of view.
- You want to note the important research that precedes your own.

Paraphrasing means re-phrasing the words of an author, putting his/her thoughts in your own words. When you paraphrase, you re-work the source’s ideas, words, phrases, and sentence structures with your own. Like quotations, paraphrased material must be followed with in-text documentation and cited on your Works-Cited page.

Paraphrase when:

- You plan to use information on your note cards and wish to avoid plagiarizing.
- You want to avoid overusing quotations.
- You want to use your own voice to present information.

Summarizing involves putting the main idea(s) of one or several writers into your own words, including only the main point(s). Summaries are significantly shorter than the original and take a broad overview of the source material. Again, it is necessary to attribute summarized ideas to their original sources.

Summarize when:

- You want to establish background or offer an overview of a topic.
- You want to describe knowledge (from several sources) about a topic.
- You want to determine the main ideas of a single source.

These tips will help you as you take notes. Include any direct quotes or unique phrases in quotation marks or mark with a big Q and make sure the speaker's /writer's name is identified. Make sure you note a paraphrase with the writer's name and mark it with a big P. Include page numbers and source references so you can go back and check for accuracy as you write.

What about the Web?

Material on the Internet is not "free." It still needs to be cited. Don't avoid citing Internet sources and articles from electronic databases just because you don't know how. When citing a web source in-text, you are not likely to have page numbers. Just include the first part of the entry. Most importantly, NEVER copy and paste directly from the internet!

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