You probably know that buying a research paper online and turning it in as your own work is plagiarism of the worst kind. But do you really understand what plagiarism is and what it is not? Are you comfortable that you understand when you need to document (cite) a source and when you do not? Do you know what criteria to apply when you need to decide if a particular piece of information needs to be documented in your paper? Most students who encounter plagiarism problems in college do so because they lack a clear understanding of the ethical and community standards in an academic environment.

Plagiarism is defined as the act of claiming the words or ideas of another person as your own. Plagiarism is a serious violation of the ethical standards of academic writing, and most colleges and universities have strict penalties, including academic probation or expulsion, for students who are guilty of plagiarism. Most schools publish an official code of student conduct (sometimes called an academic integrity policy), and you should be familiar with this document as it applies to your research and writing.

Some students will knowingly copy whole passages from outside sources into their work without documentation. Such intentional academic dishonesty is the most blatant form of plagiarism. Unintentional plagiarism, however, is still a violation of academic integrity. Unacknowledged use of another person's sentences, phrases, or terminology is plagiarism, so provide a citation and use quotation marks to show exactly where you are drawing on others' work. Similarly, unacknowledged use of another person's ideas, research, or approach is also plagiarism, so write careful paraphrases. Review the checklist in Chapter 1 (page 4) for guidelines to help avoid unintentional plagiarism.

This chapter is intended to provide additional information and strategies to help you become knowledgeable about how to document sources and avoid plagiarism when writing research-based papers and projects. The proper use of source material can enhance your credibility as a researcher at the same time it ensures that you will not be guilty of unintentional plagiarism.
7a Using Sources to Enhance Your Credibility

What some students fail to realize is that citing a source in their papers, even the short ones, signals something special and positive to your readers—that you have researched the topic, explored the literature about it, and have the talent to share it. Research is something you need to share, not hide. Research writing exercises your critical thinking and your ability to collect ideas. You will discuss not only the subject matter, such as water pollution in the Delaware River, but also the literature of the topic, such as articles from the Internet and current periodicals found at your library’s databases. By announcing clearly the name of a source, you reveal the scope of your reading and thus your credibility, as in this student’s notes:

American consume an average of 500 plus liters of water per day per capita while the average person needs only 20 to 40 liters.

According to O’Malley and Bouamani,

Sudden ‘ Pfetl is a “living system that drives the workings of a natural world on earth” (141).

Pfetl declared: “A new water era has begun.” (24). She indicates that the great priorities of the world will dry up including America’s. They, when people in America notice the drought, there might something will happen.

These notes, if transferred into the paper, will enable readers to identify the sources used. The notes give clear evidence of the writer’s investigation into the subject, and they enhance the student’s image as a researcher. You will get credit for displaying the sources properly. The opposite, plagiarism, presents the information as though it were your own:

The great priorities of the world will now dry up and that includes America’s, so a new water era has begun.

That sentence borrows too much. If in doubt, cite the source and place it within its proper context.

7b Placing Your Work in Its Proper Context

Your sources will reflect all kinds of special interests, even biases, so you need to position them within your paper as reliable sources. If you must use a biased or questionable source, tell your readers up front. For example, if you are writing about the dangers of cigarette smoke, you will find different opinions in a farmer’s magazine, a health and fitness magazine, and a trade journal sponsored by a tobacco company. You owe it to your readers to scrutinize Internet sites closely and examine printed articles for:

• Special interests that might color the report.
• Lack of credentials.
• An unsponsored Web site.
• Opinionated speculation, especially that found in chat rooms.

• Trade magazines that promote special interests.
• Extremely liberal or extremely conservative positions.

Here’s an example: Norman Berkowitz, in researching articles on the world’s water supply, found an article of interest but positioned it with a description of the source, as shown in this note.

Earth first, which describes itself as a radical environmental journal, features articles by an editorial staff that uses pseudonyms, such as Sky, Jade, Ridge, and spray. In his article “The End of Lake Powell”, Sky says, “The Colorado River may soon be unable to provide for the 2.5 million people planted into its system” (25). The danger, however, is not limited to Lake Powell. Sky adds, “This overconsumption of water, compounded with a regional drought of 25 years, could mean that Lake Powell and every other reservoir in the upper Colorado River area will be without water” (24—25).

Not only does Berkowitz recognize the source with name, quotation marks, and page numbers, he identifies the nature of the magazine for his readers.

7c Understanding Copyright

The principle behind copyright law is relatively simple. Copyright begins at the time a creative work is recorded in some tangible form—a written document, a drawing, a tape recording. It does not depend on a legal registration with the copyright office in Washington, DC, although published works are usually registered. Thus, the moment you express yourself creatively on paper, in song, on a canvas, that expression is your intellectual property. You have a vested interest in any profits made from the distribution of the work. For that reason, songwriters, cartoonists, fiction writers, and other artists guard their work and do not want it disseminated without compensation. Recent attempts to prevent the downloading of music onto private computers is a demonstration of this concern.

Scholarly writing is not a profitmaking profession, but the writers certainly deserve recognition. We can give that recognition by providing in-text citations and bibliography entries. As a student, you may use copyrighted material in your research paper under a doctrine of fair use as described in the U.S. Code, which states:

The fair use of a copyrighted work ... for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research is not an infringement of copyright.

Thus, as long as you borrow for educational purposes, such as a paper to be read by your instructor, you should not be concerned. Just give the source the proper recognition and documentation, as explained next in section 7d. However, if you decide to publish your research paper on a Web site, then new considerations come into play (see 7g, “Seeking Permission to Publish Material on Your Web Site”).
7d Avoiding Plagiarism

There are a number of steps you can take to avoid plagiarizing. First, develop personal notes full of your own ideas on a topic. Discover how you feel about the issue. Then, rather than copy sources one after another onto your pages of text, try to express your own ideas while synthesizing the ideas of the authorities by using summary, paraphrase, or direct quotation, which are explained fully on pages 146–157. Rethink and reconsider ideas gathered during your reading, make meaningful connections, and, when you refer to the ideas or exact words of a source—as you inevitably will—give the other writer full credit.

To repeat, plagiarism is offering the words or ideas of another person as one’s own. Major violations, which can bring failure in the course or expulsion from school, are:

- The use of another student’s work.
- The purchase of a “canned” research paper.
- Copying whole passages into a paper without documentation.
- Copying a key, well-worded phrase into a paper without documentation.
- Putting specific ideas of others into your own words without documentation.
- Inadequate or missing citation.
- Missing quotation marks.
- Incomplete or missing Works Cited entry.

Whether deliberate or not, these instances all constitute forms of plagiarism. Unintentional plagiarism is often a result of carelessness. For example:

- The writer fails to enclose quoted material within quotation marks, yet he or she provides an in-text citation with name and page number.
- The writer’s paraphrase never quite becomes paraphrase—too much of the original is left intact—but he or she provides a full citation to name and page.

In these situations, instructors must step in and help the beginning researcher, for although these cases are not flagrant instances of plagiarism, they can mar an otherwise fine piece of research.

Common Knowledge

You do not need to document information that is considered “common knowledge.” But how do you know what is or is not common knowledge? Use the following criteria to determine whether or not a particular piece of information can be considered common knowledge:

1. Local knowledge. You and your reader might share local or regional knowledge on a subject. For example, if you attend Northern Illinois University, you need not cite the fact that Illinois is known as the Land of Lincoln, that Chicago is its largest city, or that Springfield is the capital city. Information of this sort requires no in-text citation, as shown in the following example.

   The flat, rolling hills of Illinois form part of the great Midwestern Corn Belt. It stretches from its border with Wisconsin in the north to the Kentucky border in the south. Its political center is Springfield in the center of the state, but its industrial and commercial center is Chicago, that great bustling city poised on the shores of Lake Michigan.

2. Research Tip

Documenting Borrowed Ideas and Words

As an academic writer, you must document fully any borrowed ideas and words. The academic citation—name, page number, and Works Cited entry—establishes two things beyond your reliability and credibility:

1. A clear trail for other researchers to follow if they also want to consult the source.
2. Information for other researchers who might need to replicated (reproduce) the project.

"Denisea Stillman states "a young teacher's ability to think about the future, to touch the future, and to develop life-long learners will eliminate first year jitters, worries, and pessimism."

That's it—no page number and no reference to the title of the journal article. As a researcher, you must provide specific information so a reader could go in search of the full essay by Stillman. Following is a more complete use of source information:

"Denisea Stillman, in her essay "Lessons for Future Educators," says "a young teacher's ability to think about the future, to touch the future, and to develop life-long learners will eliminate first year jitters, worries, and pessimism."

When you provide an academic citation, you have made it clear when you have read, how you used it in your paper, and where others can find it.
CHECKLIST

Documenting Your Sources

- Let the reader know when you begin borrowing from a source by introducing the quotation or paraphrase with the name of the authority.
- Enclose within quotation marks all quoted materials—both key phrases and sentences.
- Use an indented block for quotations of four lines or more.
- Make certain that paraphrased material has been rewritten in your own style and language. The simple rearrangement of sentence patterns is unacceptable.
- Provide specific in-text documentation for each borrowed item, but keep in mind that styles differ for MLA, APA, CSE, and CMS standards.
- Provide a bibliography entry in the Works Cited for every source cited in the paper, including sources that appear only in content footnotes or an appendix.

However, a writer in another place and time might need to cite the source of this information. Most writers would probably want to document this next passage:

Early Indian tribes on the plains called themselves Illiniwek (which meant strong men), and French settlers pronounced the name Illinois (Anglin 44).

2. Shared experiences. Coursework and lectures will give you and members of your class a similar perspective on the subject. For example, students in a literature class studying African American writers would share common information, so the student might write, without documentation, something like this:

Langston Hughes, an important poet in the 1920s and 1930s, became a leader of the Harlem Renaissance, and like so many writers, he took great pride in his African American heritage. He was not afraid to use the vernacular black dialect, and I would say that he is one of the fathers of today's rap music.

If the student shifts to nongeneral information, then a citation is in order:

Hughes has been described by Gerald Early as the major artistic link between the revolutionary poet Paterson Lawrence Dunbar and the radical poet Amiri Baraka (246).

3. Common facts. Common factual information that one might find in an almanac, fact book, or dictionary need not be cited. Here is an example:

President George Herbert Walker Bush launched the Desert Storm attack in 1991 against Iraq and its leader, Saddam Hussein, with the support of allies and their troops from several nations. His son, President George W. Bush, launched a similar attack in 2003 against the same dictator and his army.

The passage needs no documentation, but the farther we move in history from that time and place, the more likely will be the need for documentation. Of course, provide a citation for analysis that goes beyond common facts.

The elder Bush demonstrated great mastery in his diplomatic unification of a politically diverse group of allies (Wolford 37).

CHECKLIST

Common Knowledge That Does Not Need to Be Documented

- Do not document the source if an intelligent person would and should know the information, given the context of both writer and audience.
- Do not document terminology and information from a classroom environment that have become common knowledge to all members of the class.
- Do not document the source if you knew the information without reading it in an article or book.
- Do not document almanac-type information, such as date, place of birth, occupation, and so on.
- Do not document information that has become general knowledge by being reported repeatedly in many different sources (i.e., Michael Jordan holds several National Basketball Association [NBA] scoring records).