Avoiding Plagiarism

by Sophia

1. Styles of Citation

Avoiding plagiarism involves citing your sources, but how does citation work and what does it look like?

A **citation** is a note that you place within a project or paper that indicates to the reader or viewer that the information you included is not your own words or ideas. In other words, a citation is a way of giving credit to the original author and material you used as a source. Citations are important in higher education because they help you avoid plagiarism. There are specific sets of guidelines for the formatting of citations that depend on the type of course you are taking and your instructor's preferences. These sets of guidelines are known as citation styles.

There are three major styles of citation that you might be asked to use, depending on the subject you are working in or just the individual preference of the instructor:

- MLA (Modern Language Association)
- Chicago (named for Chicago Manual of Style; sometimes known as "Turabian")
- APA (American Psychological Association).

Each style has a different approach to in-text citation and the format for a bibliography or "Works Cited" page. Make sure you know which style a given assignment is supposed to be cited in, and if you don't know, consult your syllabus or ask your instructor.

↪ **EXAMPLE** Let's say you want to quote the following from Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance," which you find on page 269 of a book of collected essays of Emerson's: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." How do you cite this in text in all three styles?

In MLA and APA, you would cite in parentheses between the end of the quotation and the period:
- MLA: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds" (Emerson 269).
- APA: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds" (Emerson, 1983, p. 269).

To use the Chicago style, you would use a footnote instead of a parenthetical citation.

You should use the style your instructor prefers and refer to a style guide or an online resource to help you cite your sources correctly.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

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2. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is an integral part of writing with research that entails putting something you have read into your own words. If you want to summarize general ideas or information from an outside source, you paraphrase it. Paraphrasing is a good way to condense bigger chunks of information for efficiency, but it can also help you to isolate key points from your research.

When you work with outside sources, you want to move between your "voice" and the writers you're quoting or paraphrasing as seamlessly and organically as possible. Try your best to translate the ideas you encounter into your own words in order to convey a sense of the original but filtered through your own perspective. This way you are actively engaged with the research and your paraphrasing won't veer toward plagiarism.

3. Plagiarism and Other Media: Images, Video, Music

Plagiarism isn't just limited to the realm of books and articles. Any time you use any outside media—that is, something that you did not create yourself—including images, videos, and music, you should provide a citation.

All of these things are subject to copyright law, and it is your responsibility to make sure you give the proper attribution when you make use of someone else's intellectual property. Resources that help you with citation, which will be discussed next, will provide examples of how to cite all kinds of media.

4. Citing AI-Generated Text

Because the widespread availability of AI-powered chatbots is relatively new, the rules around when and how to cite AI-generated text are still evolving. All three major citation styles – MLA, Chicago, and APA – provide information online about how to format a citation for a generative AI tool.

You should include a citation when you quote or paraphrase text written by a chatbot, just as you would for any other outside source that helps to shape your work. Many instructors also want you to disclose any functional use of AI tools, such as using one to edit your writing. Again, the best approach is to ask your instructor about their expectations beforehand.

5. Resources to Help with Citation

If you are not sure how to cite in a particular style or you have a specific question about a minor aspect of citation within a style, there are several places you can turn to for help. The internet is chock full of resources for writers and researchers.

One popular and useful website is the Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab). There are also several websites that will put a citation in the proper format if you enter the relevant information, such as easybib.com or citationmachine.net.

☆ **BIG IDEA**

Now that you understand the meaning and parameters of plagiarism, it will be easy to avoid, and you'll find that academically honest students can put the same kind of digital resources that make plagiarism easy to detect to positive use. Our current "information age" is characterized by access to everything—good, bad, and neutral. If you can harness the power of the internet for helping yourself learn things, and not for stealing ideas, you will find that it makes things like checking proper citations much easier.

SUMMARY

Plagiarism can be avoided by properly **citing the sources** you draw from. Use the **citation style** that your instructor prefers. **Plagiarism can occur with other media such as videos, images, and music**, so it is important these are cited in addition to texts. There are many online **resources to help with citation**.

	TERMS TO KNOW

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