

AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism, also called academic dishonesty, occurs when a writer includes information that is not his or her own. Plagiarism demonstrates that a writer doesn't understand the topic he or she is analyzing, and of the Writing Studio's goals is to make sure writers understand and can write about their studies. For this reason, both intentional and unintentional instances are considered violations of the student code of conduct. This handout, which also discusses when to cite common knowledge, is designed to help writers develop strategies to avoid plagiarism.

WHY CITE?

Why do we bother citing someone else's work in our papers? Most people's initial answer is so they don't get caught plagiarizing. While that is certainly true, there are more important reasons we cite.

Citing your work gives your reader a "trail of breadcrumbs" to follow if they want to understand your logic. Any point you make will be well-documented enough that the reader doesn't have to blindly trust your argument; they can agree or disagree with you based on your analysis and the body of knowledge supporting it. Citations also give credit to the writer of the text you are using to support your points. It also, however, shows your reader that you conducted research and know your topic. Demonstrating this gives you credibility. Your reader will be more likely to trust your analysis, opinions, and ideas.

WHAT COUNTS AS PLAGIARISM?

Unintentional plagiarism is more common, but the punishment for unintentional plagiarism is the same.

INTENTIONAL PLAGIARISM	UNINTENTIONAL PLAGIARISM
Copying the work of others and turning it in as your own.	Forgetting to cite or citing incorrectly.
Fabricating sources.	Turning in the same paper for two different classes.
Having someone else do your work for you.	Citing too much (over 50% of your paper) and not including your own thoughts, ideas and words.

A LAST-MINUTE SCENARIO:

What to do if you feel tempted to plagiarize

Write a checklist	If it's the last minute, and plagiarism seems like the only option, write down a list of tasks that need completing: For instance, 1) revise thesis, 2) format citations, 3) write paragraph 3, etc. Determine which of the items on your list are the most important, and then work through the items accordingly.
Talk to your Professor or TA	<i>Receiving a late penalty is better than receiving an FF.</i> If you find yourself getting overwhelmed and are not sure you're going to make a deadline, first speak to your professor or TA and ask for an extension. Go to his or her office hours and explain your situation. Be honest about your concerns for not getting done in time or not understanding the assignment. He or she may offer you advice and support to help you do your best. Be prepared for him or her to say no and not be able to help you, but remember that receiving a late penalty is better than receiving an FF (failure due to cheating) for the class.

A LAST MINUTE SCENARIO, CONT'D:

Use one of the resources available to you	You can set up an appointment with Tutoring and Learning Services and/or the Writing Center to have someone help you work through your assignment. Tutors can offer great support and help you focus on your work. If you're overwhelmed, the USF Counseling Center is another great resource for helping you to stay focused and relaxed.
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CITING COMMON KNOWLEDGE

Sometimes writers try really hard to get all of their citations correct but still are not sure whether or not certain information needs to be cited. Outside ideas in your paper must always be cited unless they are “common knowledge.” Although these ideas are “common,” it is not uncommon to be unsure about what this includes.

GUIDELINE	EXAMPLE
Common knowledge is general knowledge that is known throughout a particular group or community.	For example, most Americans know that Independence Day is celebrated on July 4th, and the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776.
Common knowledge may change between groups or communities.	For example, in a child psychology class it is common knowledge that a toddler will begin to recognize facial expressions at 12-24 months. This would not need to be cited. However, child development stages would not be common knowledge in a professional writing class, and would therefore need to be cited.
Ask yourself where you learned the information.	If you read it or heard it somewhere (and not in a conversation you had in fifth grade), it's probably not common knowledge.
When in doubt: Cite it.	Google is a great tool. Google a keyword or phrase and find the original source.

