

The KSU Writing Center

Avoiding Plagiarism

WHAT IS IT?

Plagiarism is using someone else's work, ideas, or data without indicating the original source and providing proper acknowledgement (KSU Student Codes of Conduct 18). Plagiarism is a major academic integrity violation with serious consequences. Using this handout can help you understand plagiarism and how to avoid it. For one-on-one help incorporating researched information into your writing, make an appointment with the [KSU Writing Center](#).

Plagiarism may be unintentional. Unintentional plagiarism can result from correctly quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing a source but *incorrectly* citing (or neglecting to cite) the source in-text, at the end of the essay, or both. Reusing work submitted for other classes can also be considered unintentional plagiarism. Even if accidental, plagiarism can have serious consequences.

HOW CAN WRITERS AVOID PLAGIARISM?

Keep clear, accurate notes during the research process. Consider using double-entry research logs to keep track of what you read and to record your own responses to sources. This note-taking strategy helps you better understand your topic because you are actively engaging with your source material as you identify patterns and disagreements among different sources.

For more detailed information, see our ["Double-Entry Research Log" handout](#).

Only use information from sources you understand. Could you effectively explain the source's information to someone else? If not, it will be impossible for you to integrate it correctly, and you risk unintentional plagiarism.

Cite all information from sources correctly. Any time you refer to information or ideas that are not your own, you must cite the source within your text *and* make sure it is listed on your bibliography/works cited/references page. Citing sources correctly shows your readers which ideas and information you developed and which come from an outside source. Citations also provide your readers with a map to the original source.

Use the style format required by your instructor or the discipline. Different disciplines and contexts call for writers to follow different, often very specific, citation requirements. Unless your instructor tells you otherwise, use your discipline's preferred style guide. Common styles include MLA (Modern Language Association), APA (American Psychological Association), and CMS (Chicago Manual of Style). Ask your instructor if you are unsure of what style to follow.

For information on using AP, APA, CMS, IEE, or MLA, see our style-specific handouts [here](#).

Remember that it is better to over-cite than to under-cite. If you are unsure about whether you must cite a source, err on the side of citing too much rather than too little.

Integrate researched information by summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting. Researched writing should demonstrate that you are familiar with the existing body of knowledge about your topic, including agreements and disagreements among scholars. Use source material to support your own ideas by blending summaries, paraphrases, and direct quotations.

Summaries

- Restate only the main ideas from a source in your own words.
- Reduce a longer text into a shorter form, omitting unimportant details.
- Use word choice and phrasing *significantly different* from the original; do not copy sentence structures.
- Include citation information both within the essay and in the list of sources at the end.

Paraphrases

- Restate a key point or idea from a source in your own words.
- Use approximately the same number of words as the original text.
- Show that you have evaluated the source and determined what is useful and important about it in the context of your own argument.
- Use word choice and phrasing that are *significantly different* from the original; do not copy sentence structures.
- Include citation information both within the essay and the list of sources at the end.

Direct quotations

- Provide the author's exact text, placed in quotation marks.
- Highlight unique, precise, or powerful language in the source text.
- Use lead-in/signal phrases. E.g., *Smith writes...* or *Brown argues...*
- Include citation information both within the essay and in the list of sources at the end.

When integrating researched information, remember to...

- Summarize and paraphrase as much as possible; quote sparingly.
- Contextualize and analyze each source.
- Maintain your own voice as you introduce and comment on your research.

For more detailed information, see our "[Integrating Sources](#)" handout.

BEYOND AVOIDING PLAGIARISM: CITATIONS IMPROVE YOUR WRITING

Citing correctly means giving credit where credit is due. As you research and write, you will come to conclusions and form opinions based on your own *and* others' ideas, experiences, and experiments. Giving credit to the thinkers and researchers whose ideas and information you reference is crucial not only to avoid plagiarism but also to highlight for readers which ideas are original to *you*.

Citing others' work helps boost your own credibility. By integrating and citing credible researched information appropriately, you demonstrate that you are familiar with the current knowledge in your field.

Citing appropriately helps readers locate additional information on the topic. This allows readers to engage in the same "conversation" you have joined by researching and writing about your topic.