

Plagiarism



Drawing upon the words, research, and ideas of others is a critical part of academic writing. Failure to properly credit these sources is called **plagiarism**. Plagiarism gives a false impression of originality and is essentially stealing. This handout will help you identify common mistakes involving plagiarism and using sources incorrectly. While this handout covers some key points about plagiarism, check with your professors and consult citation guides if you have any questions about properly using sources. Remember, it is always better to be careful.

Quotes & Paraphrase

You can avoid plagiarism by either quoting or paraphrasing your sources. To quote a source, **introduce** the quote, place the quote within **quotation marks**, and then (in most cases) place your **citation** before the period.

Quote: In his notebook, Mark Twain recorded this famous maxim, “If you tell the truth, you don’t have to remember anything” (240).

To paraphrase, rephrase the quote with your own words. You do not need to surround the words with quotation marks since they are your own. The ideas, however, are not your own, and they must be cited.

Paraphrase: Mark Twain reasoned that telling the truth is simpler than telling lies because you don’t have to keep track of everything you say (240).

The best writing includes a mix of paraphrasing and direct quoting. Quotes draw attention to themselves and require analysis, while paraphrases provide smooth transitions between your thoughts and someone else’s. If an idea is phrased exactly the way you want it to be, quote it directly. Otherwise, consider paraphrasing the idea.

Citations

An in-text citation or footnote directs readers to the sources you will provide at the end of your work. The style of citation you use will differ depending on the assignments’ requirements. Common styles include APA, MLA, and Chicago formats. For further description of specific styles of documentation, see a tutor for help or reference our handouts.

In-text Citation (MLA): “If you tell the truth, you don’t have to remember anything” (Twain 240).

Footnote (Chicago): “If you tell the truth, you don’t have to remember anything.”¹

Common Knowledge

Information does not need to be documented if it is common knowledge. Becoming more familiar with writing in your discipline will help you to develop an intuitive sense of what is considered common knowledge to your readers. Here are a few types of common knowledge.

General Facts: If a fact can be found in general reference materials or in five or more sources, don’t cite it.

Example: George Washington was born in Westmoreland Co., Virginia.

Popular Opinion: An interpretation or insight that is widely held by society does not need to be cited.

Example: The Constitution is the cornerstone of American democracy.

Recognized Quotes: For very popular and familiar quotes, simply mention the speaker.

Example: As Dr. Martin Luther King said, “I have a dream.”

¹ Mark Twain, *Mark Twain’s notebook*, contr. Albert B. Paine (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1935), 240.