

Avoiding Plagiarism
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Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's words or ideas without giving proper credit or by making it seem as if the words or ideas are your own. **Plagiarism is a serious form of academic dishonesty. Students who are caught plagiarizing will receive a grade of "F" for the semester.**

Here are some general guidelines as to what constitutes this offense in the Department of English:

- Turning in material you did not write
- Turning in papers written for another class (either high school or college)
- Turning in papers drafted by you but revised or edited by others
- Failing to properly paraphrase, summarize, or quote sources

For more information about academic dishonesty and the consequences of plagiarizing, please see your CUA Student Handbook.

**Another good source for information about avoiding plagiarism and about researching in general is Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*, 5th ed. (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003). This text is required for all freshmen composition classes and is readily available from CUA's bookstore as well as other local bookstores. It can also be accessed online at www.dianahacker.com/writersref
References to this handbook are found in red throughout this document.**

Why does plagiarism constitute a serious academic offense?

Consider the purpose behind writing a research paper. What you are being asked to do is to conduct a thorough, thoughtful, insightful, and ethical study of a subject, studying the ideas and opinions of others and integrating (or perhaps contrasting) them with your own ideas. This is not just an academic exercise. Whether in your future career or in your personal life, you must be able to look at and understand issues in a comprehensive and complex way.

If you are dishonest and plagiarize, everyone loses. The authors of your sources lose, because you're stealing from them. You lose because you haven't really learned anything—not about the subject matter or about researching and arriving at knowledgeable and informed opinions. And you've become a less ethical person.

Kinds of plagiarism

Plagiarism comes in many forms—anything from downloading an Internet paper to poor paraphrasing and a failure to cite sources properly. Below we have broken down plagiarism into two categories, deliberate and careless.

Deliberate:

Keep in mind that this kind of plagiarism, especially in the digital age, is easy to commit but it's also VERY easy for an instructor to detect. Internet searches work quite well for both parties; if you can find the paper, so can your instructor.

Some types of deliberate plagiarism:

1. Buying, stealing, or “borrowing” a paper from the Internet or another student
2. Asking or engaging someone to write your paper
3. Using a paper written for another class

You cannot turn in the same paper for two classes unless arrangements are made in advance with both instructors. Even then, you will need to do more work than for a paper written for only one course.

Please note that “papers written for another class” includes turning in papers from a class you did not pass the first time. For example, if you failed English 101, you cannot turn in work written in that class the next time you take 101.

4. Cutting/pasting or copying borrowed material without citing sources
5. Using large chunks of copied material as a substitute for your own writing. For example, using quoted material—even if correctly cited—for more than 25% of the total length of the paper, is considered plagiarism because a substantial amount of the paper was not written by you.
6. Paying another to revise, edit, and/or proofread your paper

By this we don't mean being in a peer group or having someone else read and comment on your paper. Teachers of writing encourage peer feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of your writing. But you as the writer are always responsible for using feedback constructively.

What you cannot do is write a few pages and hand it over to someone else who corrects your work and then rewrites it. This offense is pretty close to #2 above—hiring someone else to write your paper.

Careless:

Researching and writing are time-consuming, meticulous processes. Many of the items presented below have to do with carelessness in note-taking and transcribing information. You must leave yourself adequate time to be accurate during the research process.

1. Improper summarizing or paraphrasing based on poor or inaccurate note-taking during the research process
2. “Forgetting” to include in-text citations, quotation marks or a Works Cited page

3. Presenting someone's ideas as your own without citation

If you develop someone's idea in a different or in your own direction, make sure you put in a citation for the author's ideas and indicate CLEARLY where your own thoughts begin.

General Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism

When researching and taking notes

Give yourself enough time to do the work.

This really is the most important thing. If you give yourself enough time, you can find good sources, take good notes, draft and rewrite, and still have some time to go back and make sure all your citations are correct and your Works Cited is in good shape. No doubt lots of cheating comes from panic or from running out of time, but it doesn't really matter—you are still plagiarizing.

Think about photocopying what you can. (For English 101, 102, 111, and 105, you'll need to photocopy the pages you cite to turn in with your rough draft and final copy).

A nice thing about having a photocopy is that you don't need to rely on quickly or perhaps inaccurately taken notes. Also, you can write right on the photocopy—a great way to start analyzing what you're reading.

Don't directly cut and paste from the Internet.

One really good way to avoid “forgetting” to paraphrase and add a citation is to make sure you never cut and paste directly into your paper. For more information, see “Advice on avoiding plagiarism when paraphrasing or summarizing” (below).

Indicate in your notes which thoughts are your own and which are borrowed.

Perhaps put a big “Q” and quotation marks by direct quotes, a “S/P” for summary/paraphrase, and an “M” for “my own ideas.” It's easy to start to get confused, especially if you're doing a lot of reading from a number of different sources. Indicate in your note-taking where ideas are coming from and you're much less likely to inadvertently plagiarize.

Include all relevant source references with the notes.

This includes such items as author, title, journal title and volume, publisher, year, and page number(s). Put this in your notes; not only will it keep you from plagiarizing, but it will save you A LOT of time when you're writing. It is not much fun looking through a stack of twenty articles and books to try and figure out where a quote came from.

When writing:

Again, give yourself enough time to write, rewrite and proofread. Check through your paper and make sure that everything that is quoted, paraphrased or summarized is accompanied by an in-text citation or footnote and is included in your bibliography. Check that all direct quotes have quotation marks. Do not just drop borrowed material in your paper without introducing it. Instead, use signal phrases to introduce all borrowed material. Examples of signal phrases include:

Dr. Smith acknowledges....President Bush contends.....As J. Doe points out...

According to student Bob Jones....The UN insists....The Governor explains...

See Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*, pp 334-35 (MLA); pp 387-88 (APA); and pp 423-24 (CMS), or use Hacker [online](#).

Put in quotation marks (or block quotes) and citations *immediately*; don't count on remembering to do it later.

As soon as you add a citation, make sure the source goes onto your Works Cited page in the correct format (MLA, APA, Chicago, or whatever your instructor requires). This accomplishes two things: you don't forget a source on the Works Cited AND you get the Works Cited page done while you're writing the paper (no last-second mad rush to get your bibliography together and correct in the 15 minutes before class).

See Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*, pp 318-20; pp 331-34 (MLA); pp 383-86 (APA); 419-22 (CMS) or use Hacker [online](#).

What needs to be cited and what is considered common knowledge?

First of all, let's consider what a "source" is. A source can be a book, article, experiment, interview, email, conversation, pamphlet, website—all kinds of different things. Basically, a source is someone or something else from which you are borrowing ideas. You must give credit where credit is due!

Below is a list of questions to guide you in determining whether or not you need to cite borrowed information:

1. Did you gain the information from a personal interview? **Cite it.**
2. Is the information from your own experiences, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, conclusions, observations or insights? **No need to cite yourself (unless you refer to something of your own which has been published).**
3. Are you using exact words or phrases taken from another source? Are these words or phrases others have developed and shared with you in writing *or* orally? **Cite it.**
4. Is the information considered a generally accepted fact, for example: "Bush has been President since 2000?" **No need to cite it.**
5. Are you reprinting diagrams, charts, pictures, illustrations, or photographs? **Cite it.**
6. Are you writing up observations, conclusions or notes from your own experiment? **No need to cite it.**

7. Are you quoting, paraphrasing or summarizing words or ideas found in sources such as periodicals, books, newspapers, websites, movies, TV shows/documentaries, ads or letters? **Cite it.**

See also Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*, p 331 (MLA); p 383 (APA); p 420 (CMS), or use Hacker [online](#).

Advice on avoiding plagiarism when paraphrasing or summarizing

Direct quotes are not the only things that need to get a citation. If you are summarizing (reducing many pages or perhaps a whole work down to a much shorter form) or paraphrasing (restating the author's ideas in your own words but keeping the length about the same), you must put in a citation (unless it's general knowledge—see above).

Summaries and paraphrases must be in your own words; if you follow the sentence structure or word choice too closely, you're plagiarizing. Read a source, put it down, and don't look at it while you summarize it in your own words. Go back and double-check yourself to make sure you've got the content right. Also, be sure that you haven't used more than three words that appear in the original (except for small words like "for," "is," etc.), and that your sentences are not of the same syntax as the original. Clearly indicate in your notes where the information is coming from.

When to use a direct quote

- When exact wording is needed for technical accuracy
- When it is important to let the debaters of an issue explain their positions in their own words
- When the words of an important authority lend weight to an argument
- When the language of a source is the topic of your discussion, as in an analysis or interpretation
- When language is especially vivid or expressive—but use sparingly (**Hacker 335**)

When to paraphrase or summarize

Except for the uses listed above, paraphrase or summarize a source in your own words. For more detailed information on how to paraphrase and summarize to avoid plagiarism, please see **Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*, especially pages 329-377 (MLA) and 381-443 (APA/CMS).** For some practice, go to the [online Hacker](#) and click on "Electronic Research Exercises."

Links to Styles for Documenting Sources

Be sure to ask your instructor what style sheet he or she wants you to use as style sheets vary from discipline to discipline. Here are three you may need:

MLA: www.mla.org

Chicago: www.libs.uga.edu/ref.chicago.htm

Make sure to ask your instructor which Chicago style she or he wants you to use (the author-date system or the documentary-note style).

APA: www.apastyle.org

Also, Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* has examples for noting and citing references for all three of these style sheets. See pp 340-67 (MLA) and pp 391-404 (APA/CMS), or use Hacker [online](#).