

Citing Sources in a Paper

To cite a source is “to quote someone as an authority or an example” (*Webster’s Dictionary*).

A citation guides readers to your sources and lets them know you have carried out accurate research. Basically, it gives credit where credit is due by leading a path back to the original source.

What happens if I don’t cite someone’s work?

When a writer uses another’s idea for research and fails to cite the source, it is considered **plagiarism**. The word plagiarism means to steal someone’s idea. It may occur in several ways and for several reasons:

- When another writer’s exact words are used without quotation marks or proper documentation
- When a student thinks only direct quotations must be documented

Now this doesn’t mean that you can take several sentences from a passage in a book or article and change a few words to make it look different. This is still considered plagiarism. The idea is for you to read the passage and put it into your own words.

Any idea taken from another source should be documented whether a direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary.

- A **paraphrase** reports information in roughly the same number of words used by the source.
- A **summary** condenses information from a source, perhaps summing up a chapter in a paragraph or paragraph in a single sentence.

However, neither a summary nor a paraphrase borrows extensive language from a source because if any part is copied verbatim it must be treated as a direct quote. When you summarize or paraphrase, it is not enough to name the source; you must restate the source’s meaning using your own words.

Direct quotes must be copied accurately, word for word, and they must be placed in quotation marks unless they have been formally set off from the text.

When writers fail to document, it destroys credibility of both the research and the researcher and it results in serious consequences.

However, there is an exception to the rule. If you have information that is common knowledge to the reader, then you would NOT need to cite it. For example, you wouldn't need to cite that Taco Bell's food is cheap. If you were to say environmentalists were suing them in 1999, then you would document that information.

So, how do I cite in my paper?

In-text citations mark places in the essay where information from outside sources are included. Depending on the documentation style, you will either use parenthetical () style or footnote/endnote citations.

Place the in-text citation as near as possible to the material without interrupting your sentence. Cite each time you refer to a source, except when all sentences in a single paragraph refer to the same source.

Every in-text citation has a matching entry in a list of references/ works cited at the end of the essay that tells the reader how to find the source.

Which documentation style do I use?

More often than not, your instructor will specify which style guidebook to follow.

Here is a general list of who uses what:

- MLA (Modern Language Association) – Humanities, Arts, English, Education
 - Uses parenthetical in-text citations (author's last name page #).
- APA (American Psychological Association) – Social Sciences, Psychology
 - Uses parenthetical in-text citations (author's last name, date of publication).
- CMS (Chicago Manual Style or Turabian) – History, Humanities
 - Uses endnotes/footnotes

For additional questions, you can find a complete reference manual on each of these documentation styles in the Center for Academic Support.

Information adapted from these sources:

The Everyday Writer by Andrea Lundford and Robert Connors
A Writer's Guidebook by Rise B. Axelrod and Charles R. Cooper
A Pocket Style Manual by Diane Hacker