

Avoiding Plagiarism

See the Concordia Code of Conduct (Academic) for more information on what constitutes plagiarism and other forms of cheating, as well as the consequences for such offenses.

When you write a research paper, you have to explain where you got your information. Some of the ideas you use will be your own, but many will have come from information you have read and people you have interviewed about the topic. To explain where the information comes from, you have to give (cite) the source.

Why cite your sources?

- To give your writing credibility. It shows you have gathered ideas from worthwhile places.
- To help the reader. It enables the reader to check and read those sources if he/she so wishes.
- To protect yourself from plagiarism. When you cite all your sources, no one can say that you stole or copied ideas from someone else.

What is plagiarism?

Concordia University defines plagiarism as:

"The presentation of the work of another person, in whatever form, as one's own or without proper acknowledgment" (Concordia Undergraduate Calendar 2009-2010, page 65)

While many people might think this means outright cheating by stealing or copying another student's work, it could just as easily refer to copying of anyone else's ideas without saying where they came from. So you are **responsible** to respect this rule by citing all your sources.

What counts as "other people's ideas"?

- All words quoted directly from another source.
- All ideas paraphrased from a source
- All ideas borrowed from another source: statistics, graphs, charts.
- All ideas or materials taken from the Internet

What doesn't count?

- You do not have to cite sources for **knowledge that is generally known**, like the dates of famous events in history or the names of past Prime Ministers. Similarly, phrases like "9/11" or "the generation gap" indicate concepts generally understood by the public.
- Also, **within your field, there may be terms which are "common knowledge"** because they are part of the knowledge shared by people in that field, like the "language experience approach" for educators, or the term "Impressionism" for art enthusiasts.
- Knowing what to cite/not to cite is also affected by culture. In North America, readers expect to be told where ideas come from. In other cultures, there may be more shared and collective understanding of certain ideas or even of memorized texts. For example, a student may have had to memorize a text as part of his learning in a particular subject. If he were to reproduce that text in his own country he need not give a source, since everyone who studied there (including the professor) would know who wrote it. In North America, however, this is not the case. A North American reader would expect to be told the author's name.

Direct quotations:

When you are using someone else's exact words, you need to place quotations marks (" . . . ") around the words. You also need to be careful not to rephrase or reorganize these words; otherwise you would be guilty of misrepresenting that author. If you want to leave out part of the author's sentence you can use three ellipsis points (...) to show that words have been omitted. Directly after the quotation, you should indicate where the information comes from, using one of the standard methods (the most used ones are MLA and APA) to document your sources. (For more specifics, refer to our on-line handouts on [MLA/APA documentation](#) or go to the [Concordia University Libraries' Citation Guides](#).)

Paraphrasing:

Many students are unclear about what it means to paraphrase. It is not acceptable to take the original phrase and rearrange a few of the original words in order to produce a paraphrase; neither is it acceptable to use the same sentence structure but just change a few key words.

Examples:

Original:

Students frequently overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotation in the final research paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes.

Lester, J. D. *Writing Research Papers*. 2nd ed. (1976) 46-47

Acceptable paraphrase:

In research papers, students often quote excessively, failing to keep quoted material down to a desirable level. Since the problem usually originates during note taking, it is essential to minimize the material recorded verbatim (Lester, 1976).

Plagiarized version:

Students often use too many direct quotations when they take notes, resulting in too many of them in the final research paper. In fact, probably only about 10% of the final copy should consist of directly quoted material. So it is important to limit the amount of source material copied while taking notes (Lester, 1976)

When you paraphrase, make sure to understand what the original is saying, then close the book and write the passage in your own words. **Also, note that you need to cite a source for a paraphrase even though you did not quote from the source directly.** In the examples above, the source, Lester, is given after the paraphrase. When you are paraphrasing rather than using exact words, mentioning the page number in the source parentheses is optional, but check with your professor as some may prefer you to include it.

These examples of paraphrasing are taken from the handout "Paraphrase - Write it in your own words." [OWL Purdue University Writing Lab](#). Available: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_paraphr.html. Accessed April 11, 2006.