

How to Avoid Plagiarism: Citing Correctly

The best way to avoid plagiarism is to know what to cite and how to cite. This isn't always as easy as it sounds, so let's take a look at these one at a time.

What to cite

If you are including information in your paper that you learned from another source, you must give credit to that source. Regardless of whether you are quoting directly, paraphrasing, or summarizing, you must acknowledge the words and ideas that you got from others.

Quoting

Any time you use the exact language of another author, even if it is only a phrase, you must put that language in quotation marks and add a citation. To avoid having a paper that goes from one quotation to the next, be selective about quotes.

Choose only those where the language is so clear that you need the author's words.

Use only that part of the sentence that convey the idea you need.

Examples:

"On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord" (Obama, 2009). The string of phrases creates a rhythm that is essential to the meaning. This excerpt from Barack Obama's first inaugural speech [will lose its impact if you try to paraphrase](#).

"Looking toward the other end of the timeline, the 1920 ratification of the 19th amendment, while leading to the largest infusion of new voters in American history, in reality left many women out" (Chambers, 2020). This [idea can easily be paraphrased](#) as: *The passage of the 19th amendment brought an unprecedented number of new voters, but many women were still not included* (Chambers, 2020). This information from an article about the history of women's suffrage [should be credited to the author](#) even though you didn't use author's words.

In his first inaugural address, Obama urged the audience to choose "hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord" (Obama, 2009). Sometimes we want [just one or two phrases](#) from the author, while [paraphrasing the rest](#).

Paraphrasing and Summarizing

Even though you put it in your own words, you still need to cite. When you are summarizing a whole article, introduce the article right at the beginning.

You don't need to cite if the information is readily available and common knowledge.

Examples:

In J. Hillis Miller's discussion of *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens, Miller points out that... As you go on, [continue to mention the author](#). Miller also suggests... This method alerts the reader to go to the references or works cited to find the full reference. Do not wait until a citation at the end to "cover" a whole paragraph of summary.

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If the information, though new to you, is a fact available in many sources, you need not cite it. For example, the statement *Ronald Reagan was the 40th president of the United States* needs no citation.

“Reagan’s sincerity, goodwill, strong desire for negotiations, and shared commitment to nuclear abolition” led to the eventual end to the Cold War (Leffler, 2018). All the information in this example is the opinion of that writer and needs to be cited, even though **only a phrase is quoted and the rest is paraphrased**.

Tips for Citation

Consult a style guide (APA, MLA, and Turabian) for your documentation style **often**.

You don’t need to cite if the information is readily available and common knowledge.

- Study the documentation style you want to use *before* you start note-taking. That way you will know what information you need to have (dates, urls, page or paragraph numbers, etc.) and won’t be trying to find them again right before the paper is due.
- Take careful notes. It is tempting to copy and paste paragraphs into your rough draft telling yourself you will remember where you got them. You may not remember! Anything you paste into your document “for now” needs to be tagged with where it came from. Putting direct quotes in quotation marks right at the beginning can save you headaches later.
- If you are paraphrasing in your notes, remember that you must use your own words. Don’t try to paraphrase by staring at the quote and using a thesaurus to find new words.

Instead follow these tips:

- Read the passage until you are sure you understand it
- Put the passage aside and write it in your own words
- Go back and check to make sure that you haven’t used the exact language, that your paraphrase is about the same size as the original, and that you have retained the meaning
- Remember that a paraphrase still needs to be cited - these are your words, but not your idea