

Citing Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism

A Handout from the EcoTeach Center, Duke University

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Let's begin with a definition. Perkins Library, in its online "Guide to Library Research," quotes the Modern Language Association's definition of plagiarism: "Whenever you draw on another's work, you must specify what you borrowed whether facts, opinions, or quotations and where you borrowed it from. Using another person's ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source constitutes plagiarism. . . . In short, to plagiarize is to give the impression that you wrote or thought something that you in fact borrowed from someone, and to do so is a violation of professional ethics" (www.lib.duke.edu/libguide/plagiarism.htm). According to the guide, plagiarism includes (but is not limited to) copying from published sources without adequate documentation, purchasing a pre-written paper (either by mail or electronically), letting someone else write a paper for you, paying someone else to write a paper for you, and/or submitting as your own someone else's unpublished work, either with or without permission.

Avoiding plagiarism, in principle, is easy to do. All it requires is that you be honest and adequately document the sources of the ideas and words you use in your paper. The library's online guide offers strategies for avoiding plagiarism, such as expect the research process to take time and take notes carefully.

Understandably, you want to be original; you may therefore try to borrow from others as little as possible in order to produce a paper comprised mainly of your own thoughts. But this way of thinking overlooks the reasons why scholars use other sources in the first place and how using other sources actually *strengthens* a paper. *Indeed, virtually no paper can be considered scholarly if it does not draw on and credit the work of others.* Scholars consult the work of others to avoid duplicating what has already been done. They draw on and cite the work of colleagues to establish their scholarly credentials, to demonstrate knowledge of the relevant literature, to position their argument within a certain context, and to enable readers to locate the sources of their evidence. You should do the same.

To avoid plagiarism, you need to cite your sources. But *how* do you cite a source? Sources can be cited in a number of ways. In fact, elaborate systems, or styles, have been developed that tell you how to cite a given source. Three common styles are the MLA (Modern Language Association) style, the Chicago style (detailed in the *Chicago Manual of Style* and used by the University of Chicago Press, among others), and the APA (American Psychological Association) style. The APA style is often used in the social sciences. For details and examples of these styles, see Perkins Library's guide to citing sources (<http://library.duke.edu/research/guides/citing/>), or consult the print versions of those style guides.

For more on plagiarism and citing sources, please see "Citing Sources," Part 7 of Perkins Library's online "Guide to Library Research," or schedule an appointment with the EcoTeach writing tutor (www.econ.duke.edu).