

## Selected Guidelines for Writing Research Papers and Providing Appropriate Attribution

**Sources of Information: Primary and Secondary Sources** (From: Gibaldi, Joseph, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 1995, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition: p. 2; Campbell, William et al., *Form and Style: Theses, Reports, Term Papers*, 1978, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition: p. 79)

The research paper is generally based on primary research, secondary-research, or a combination of the two. Primary research is the study of a subject through firsthand observation and investigation, such as analyzing a literary or historical text, conducting a survey, or carrying out a laboratory experiment. *Primary sources* include statistical data, historical documents, and works of literature and art. Secondary research is the examination of studies that other researchers have made of a subject. Examples of *secondary sources* are books and articles about political issues, historical events, scientific debates, or literary works (p. 2).

The distinction is an important one in investigations that rely on documents for fundamental data and information, because original documents and accounts, or exact copies of them, are generally quite superior to secondary sources in satisfying criteria of scholarship, and because a writer reflects a standard of scholarship in making an accurate distinction between the two kinds of sources in the bibliographical listing (p. 79).

When writing a research paper, it is important that every effort be made to use and cite primary sources when possible. If a secondary source provides information about a primary source, the primary source should be sought out and appropriately attributed. A secondary source can be cited as well (particularly if it provides *additional* information), but it should not be the only source cited. This would leave the reader with the impression that it is the original source of the data/information.

**Fraud and Plagiarism** (From: *AMA Manual of Style*, 1989, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition: p. 72)

Fraud and plagiarism are deliberate attempts to deceive. Fraud in science may range from the fabrication of data to the manipulation of real data to achieve a predetermined desired result. In plagiarism, an author passes off as his or her own the ideas, language, data, graphics, or even scientific protocols created by someone else, whether published or unpublished. Plagiarism of published work violates copyright laws as well as standards of honesty and collegial trust and may be subject to penalty imposed by a court should the holders of the copyright bring suit. Four common kinds of plagiarism have been identified (Northwestern University):

1. direct verbatim lifting of passages,
2. rewording of ideas from the original in the purported author's own style,
3. paraphrasing the original work without attribution, and
4. noting the original source of only some of what is borrowed.

The common characteristic of all these kinds of plagiarism is the failure to attribute words, ideas, or findings to their true author(s). Such failure to acknowledge a source properly may on occasion be caused by careless note taking or ignorance of the canons of research, and coincidences of ideas can occur. The best defense against charges of fraud and plagiarism is careful note taking and documentation of all data observed and sources used (p. 72).

**Avoiding Plagiarism** (From: *The Little, Brown Handbook*, 1995, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition: p. 578-580)

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas or words as your own. Whether deliberate or accidental, plagiarism is a serious and often punishable offense.

#### Deliberate plagiarism

- Copying a phrase, a sentence, or a longer passage from a source and passing it off as your own.
- Summarizing or paraphrasing someone else's ideas without acknowledging your debt.
- Handing in as your work a paper you have bought, had a friend write, or copied from another student.

#### Accidental Plagiarism

- Forgetting to place quotation marks around another author's words .
- Summarizing or paraphrasing someone else's ideas without acknowledging your debt.
- Carelessly copying a source when you mean to paraphrase.

You do not plagiarize, however, when you draw on other writers' material and acknowledge your sources. That procedure is a crucial part of honest research writing, as we have seen. This section shows you how to avoid plagiarism by acknowledging sources when necessary and by using them accurately and fairly.

More than in many other cultures, teachers in the United States value students' original thinking and writing. In some other cultures, for instance, students may be encouraged to copy the words of scholars without acknowledgement, to demonstrate their mastery of or respect for the scholars' work. But in the United States, use of another's words or ideas without a source citation is plagiarism and is unacceptable. Always use quotation marks around a direct quotation and cite the source. Cite the source as well for any idea you borrow from someone else, even if you state the idea in your own words. When in doubt about the guidelines in this section, ask your instructor for advice (p. 579).

**Knowing What to Acknowledge** (From: *The Little, Brown Handbook*, 1995, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition: p. 579-580)

When you write a research paper, you coordinate information from three kinds of sources: (1) your independent thoughts and experiences; (2) common knowledge, the basic knowledge people share; and (3) other people's independent thoughts and experiences. Of the three, you *must* acknowledge the third, the work of others.

*1. Your independent material*

You need not acknowledge your own independent material—your thoughts, compilations of facts, or experimental results, expressed in your words or format—to avoid plagiarism. Such material includes observations from your experience (for example, a conclusion you draw about crowd behavior by watching crowds at concerts) as well as diagrams you construct from information you gather yourself. Though you generally should describe the basis for your conclusions so that readers can evaluate your thinking, you need not cite sources for them.

*2. Common knowledge*

Common knowledge consists of the standard information of a field of study as well as folk literature and commonsense observations.

- Folk literature, such as the fairy tale, “Snow White,” is popularly known and cannot be traced to a particular writer. Literature traceable to a writer is not folk literature, even if it is very familiar.
- A commonsense observation is something most people know, such as that inflation is most troublesome for people with low and fixed incomes. An economist's ideas about the effects of inflation on Chinese immigrants is not a commonsense observation.

You may treat common knowledge as your own, even if you have to look it up in a reference book. You may not know, for example, the dates of the French Revolution or the standard definition of “photosynthesis,” although these are considered common knowledge. If you do not know a subject well enough to determine whether a piece of information is common knowledge, make a record of the source as you would for any other quotation, paraphrase, or summary.

*3. Someone else's independent material*

You must always acknowledge other people's independent material—that is, any facts or ideas that are not common knowledge or your own. The source may be anything, including a book, an article, a movie, an interview, a microfilmed document, a computer program, or a newsgroup posting. You must acknowledge not only the ideas or facts themselves but also the language and format in which the ideas or facts appear (p. 580).

### **Checklist for Avoiding Plagiarism**

- ❑ What type of source are you using: your own independent material, common knowledge, or someone else's independent material? You must acknowledge someone else's material.
- ❑ If you are quoting someone else's material, is the quotation exact? Have you inserted quotation marks around quotations run into the text? Are graphs, statistics, and other borrowed data identical to the source? Have you shown omissions with ellipsis marks and additions with brackets?
- ❑ If you are paraphrasing or summarizing someone else's material, have you used your own words and sentence structures? Does your paraphrase or summary employ quotation marks when you resort to the author's exact language? Have you represented the author's meaning without distortion?
- ❑ If you are using someone else's material in your own online publication, have you obtained any needed permission for your use?
- ❑ Is each use of someone else's material acknowledged in your text? Are all your source citations complete and accurate?
- ❑ Does your list of works cited include all the sources you have drawn from in writing your paper (p. 579)?