

How to Avoid Plagiarizing

Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional representation of another's ideas and/or words as your own. According to WCU's Academic Integrity Policy (<http://academicintegrity.wcu.edu>), the consequences for plagiarism can be dire.

Students who *intentionally plagiarize* are unwilling to participate in reading, analysis, note taking, and drafting their work. They may buy a paper from a fellow student or off the Internet in order to fulfill a requirement or appear knowledgeable without doing any of the required work.

Unintentional plagiarism results from a student not knowing how to take good notes or maintain good writing and revision practices.

In addition to the more traditional violations, here are some common forms of plagiarism which can sometimes be unintentional:

Patchworking: piecing chunks of text together from different sources. A common sign that a paper has been patchworked is when parenthetical citations (if there are any) appear *only at the ends* of paragraphs or major discussions of important content.

Idea Plagiarism: co-opting or insufficiently crediting a source's studies or ideas. In other words, students may write about a theory or concept and explain it accurately, but they may neglect to discuss that concept's origins as *someone else's* unique idea.

Altering or Misrepresenting a Source: changing or discussing a source to fit one's own argument, or without explaining its original context. While writers may do this intentionally, it is quite common for someone to inadvertently misuse or misrepresent a source. This often happens if *the writer does not understand or has not fully read the source material*.

Leaning too heavily on one source: basing an entire paper or argument on insufficient research.

Close paraphrasing/summarizing: changing only a few words from the source text, or relying too heavily on others' abstracts and introductions.

The choices you make in college about note-taking, reading, summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting research materials will help shape your credibility and skill as an intelligent listener and communicator in your future career. Choose wisely.

What You Do Not Need to Document

You are generally not required to document *standard definitions* from dictionaries or background information from encyclopedia articles. Of course, if you quote word-for-word from the dictionary or encyclopedia, you must cite the quote... but *dictionaries and encyclopedias are usually not considered good sources for advanced research papers*.

You are also not required to cite facts, dates, concepts, and events over which there is no debate, such as the battle sites of the Civil War, or the fact that Renoir was a French Impressionist painter. *You* may be learning the information for the first time, but no one is going to argue over whether that information is accurate. In other words, *"common" knowledge does not belong to any one writer in particular*.

What You Do Need to Document

Any **direct quotes** or **specific data** original to another's work should always be cited. This includes **statistics and study results**. Further, **direct paraphrases and summaries** should also be documented. **Concepts and theories** should also be documented carefully. Students often overlook this last rule, and it is a serious error. In general, then, *if you use something that you did not make or say yourself, and if what you use is not considered common knowledge, cite it*. If you are unsure whether to give credit for something, it's often best to cite it anyway, just in case.

When you research a topic, you should employ many kinds of sources. Common knowledge sources are a good starting point, but as your research becomes more specialized, you should look for and rely on works that make specific points and arguments about your topic. Thus, your own thinking will begin to take shape. As you move from researching to writing your paper, develop your own point or argument (your thesis), just as the writers of your sources have done.

Documenting and incorporating the sources into your paper which have helped shape your point demonstrates your integrity, convinces your reader that you have researched the larger discussion around your topic, and provides addresses (citations) for your reader to learn more.

What You Need For an Accurate Citation

After you select and read your sources, be sure to *write down* the following information in your notes:

- **For a book:** Record the author (and/or editor), title (including the title of any specific chapters you have used), place of publication, publisher, date of publication, and numbers of the pages you quote.
- **For a journal article:** Record the author, title of the article, name of the journal, volume number, issue number or month, and the page numbers.
- **For electronic and web sources:** Record whatever is available and pertinent from the following list: author, title, date of publication, and original page numbers (if given); title of the database (for example, Academic Search Premier or JSTOR); publication medium (for example, Web); name of vendor (if given, EBSCO, for example); date you located the information; and web address.
- **Any specific guidelines your instructor provides, and/or specific style requirements.** MLA, APA, Turabian, and AMA how-tos are available in the WaLC, or on our website at <http://www.wcu.edu/11655.asp>.

Every summary, paraphrase and direct quotation must have an appropriate citation within the text of your paper and a corresponding entry on the final Works Cited, References or Bibliography page.

By including both in-text and bibliographic citations, you are providing your reader with excellent directions for finding your sources and reading more.

When in doubt about what to document,
remember you are speaking for authors who cannot speak for themselves.

If you need help with note-taking strategies for research papers, go to the WaLC's website, or schedule an appointment with your instructor, a writing tutor, or an Academic Skills Consultant.

How to Summarize

Summarizing involves **condensing the writer's ideas into their essence using your own words** when you want to briefly discuss an extended section of a text. A summary is *your sum of the writer's thinking*. Summaries vary in length, but are rarely more than twenty percent of the length of the original. Summaries also include abstracts, but abstracts are a different style of writing (see the WaLC's website for more advice on those.) When you need to summarize:

1. Read the section straight through from beginning to end. Look up unfamiliar words. Make sure you understand what you are reading. *You cannot translate information you do not understand.*
2. Minimize the screen, or turn the text over. **Without looking at the original**, write your summed up understanding of the section. *(Not peeking at the text forces you to use your own words.)*
3. Read the original text a second time to check the accuracy of your rewording. Your new sentences will become the body of your summary.
4. Using your new sentences, write a first draft of your summary.
5. Begin your summary with the original writer's name, for example, in APA you might write: According to Deford (2000),....(See page 4 for examples from various formats.)
6. Check your draft against the original source:
 - **Have you accurately communicated the main idea and supporting points?**
 - **Have you followed the same order or sequence of ideas that the original writer used?**
 - **Have you discussed the author's most important concepts or terms in your own words?**
 - **Would your summary make sense to a reader other than yourself, especially one who has not read the original source but wants to understand what it says?**
7. Revise and recheck against the original. Record the page number(s) in case you need them later.

How to Paraphrase

When you paraphrase effectively, **you are restating the writer's words in your own words without condensing anything**. Paraphrasing works well for discussing one point from an article or book. A good paraphrase is roughly equivalent in length to the original. The following strategy will help you:

1. Read the section carefully. Look up unfamiliar words.
2. Turn the original over and write down **your understanding** of the text. Consider beginning your paraphrase with the writer's name, for example: In *Talk*, Marguerite Del Guidice argues that
3. Reread the original and check your rephrasing for accuracy. **Rearranging the writer's words or leaving out/changing a few words is not paraphrasing.**
4. Record the page number(s) for your in-text citation if required. **All paraphrases must be cited.**

How to Quote

When you quote, **you are transcribing the writer's words completely and accurately. Quoting does not work well if you use it only because you find it hard to paraphrase a writer's material. Quoting does work well when the writer has made his or her point so articulately that *your point is strengthened by including a quotation.***

Follow the guidelines in your writer's handbook to learn the various ways of introducing quotations. ALL QUOTATIONS MUST BE INTRODUCED. Try introducing your quotation with the writer's name, and be sure to enclose all quoted material within quotation marks. Page numbers stand outside the quotation marks but inside the period. Several examples follow:

MLA formatting - Karen Elizabeth Gordon writes in her introduction to *The Well-Tempered Sentence*, "However frenzied or disarrayed or complicated your thoughts may be, punctuation tempers them and sends signals to your reader about how to take them in" (ix).

APA formatting - Gordon (1993) says of the exclamation point, "What a wild, reckless, willful invention! How could we possibly live without it! Who needs words when we have this flasher!" (p. 1).

Turabian formatting - Karen Elizabeth Gordon thinks of the comma as "a delicate kink in time, a pause within a sentence, a chance to catch your breath."¹

[At the bottom of the page, the following footnote would appear:

1. Karen Elizabeth Gordon, *The New Well-Tempered Sentence: A Punctuation Handbook for the Innocent, the Eager, and the Doomed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 21.]

Remember, quote strategically to emphasize *your point* and NEVER quote simply because you are unwilling to do the hard work of paraphrasing or discussing the material.

EXCEPTION: If you are writing a paper for a *literature class*, the guidelines are different. **Frequent** quoting of your primary source (story, poem, novel, creative essay, or play) is **important** to provide your reader with direct evidence. In other words, you are bringing pertinent parts of the text into your paper to show that your interpretation is sound and based on the writer's actual words. For more detailed information on writing about literature, see our mini-course titled Literature Papers.

Remember, your reader (i.e., your professor) *is truly engaged and wants to learn what you have discovered.* Take the time to make your research interesting and legitimate.

The Writing and Learning Commons will gladly help you at any point in your research and writing process. We are located in Hunter Library 30. Call 227-7197 or visit our website at <http://walc.wcu.edu>.

Some examples of paraphrases, summaries, and quotes follow on the next page.

Examples of Summarizing, Paraphrasing and Quoting

Original text from the *Journal of Sport Management*:

One of the most contentious debates surrounding the indirect effects of athletics concerns its impact upon non-athletic gifts to universities. The major improvements of programs at Northwestern in 1995 and Georgia Tech in 1991 prompted speculation and some anecdotal evidence supporting the argument that athletic success contributes to additional general giving. However, this evidence and the proposition behind it has often met strong rebuttal.

The reasons behind the challenges are easy to understand; the likely impacts of athletics on general giving are much harder to unambiguously assess than are the types of effects we have discussed to date (athletic department revenues and expenses, media coverage). Moreover, the cause-effect relationships can be quite ambiguous. Some benefactors are interested in both athletics and general university welfare but have a fixed amount of money they are willing to donate. In such cases, increased athletic success may help steer these donors toward athletic giving and away from general gifts. On the other hand, greater exposure for a university, whatever its source, may help spur giving across many fronts. The effect that is expected to dominate (athletic vs. general giving) cannot be theoretically determined.

Comparisons across empirical studies are complicated by the use of different dependent variables, use of different variables to account for athletic success, different control variables, and a lack of investigation of lag relationships. For example, Baade and Sundberg (1996) try to explain gifts per alumni for 167 schools over an eighteen-year period, Grimes and Chressanthi (1994) consider annual gifts for one school over a thirty-year time frame, and McCormick and Tinsley (1990) estimate the relationship between athletic gifts and general giving. Even if effects are determined using comparable methods for different institutions, the answer as to whether athletic success and athletic giving reduce or increase general giving may depend on the specific university in question as well as the specific circumstances surrounding its athletic success (e.g., how "big" and how novel the success was.). (Goff, 2000, pp. 92-93)

Sample Summary:

According to Goff (2000), there is no conclusive evidence about the relationship between athletic success and general donations to universities. Athletic success increases a university's exposure, which may attract general gifts, or may instead increase donations only to athletics, to the detriment of other areas. Determining the effect athletic success has on general giving has proved to be challenging and occasionally controversial. Goff explains there is no consistent method for studying this phenomenon, and that the unique variables at different schools further complicate the results of any study.

Sample Paraphrase of Paragraph 2:

Goff (2000) points out that athletic success may initiate increased giving to the university as a whole, but some benefactors may only have an allotted amount of money for such purposes. In the event that a benefactor is equally interested in the university's athletic achievements and the university as a whole, he or she could choose to donate money in either direction. Since the athletic success highlighted the athletic department, a benefactor could naturally gravitate toward furthering the success of that department. In contrast, the athletic success also reflected well on the university as a whole, and a benefactor could therefore choose to donate money to one or more university departments. The effect athletic success has on general giving is thus highly variable and difficult to study.

Sample Quotations:

Goff (2000) contends that "one of the most contentious debates surrounding the indirect effects of athletics concerns its impact upon non-athletic gifts to universities" (p. 92).

Goff (2000) maintains that when studying athletic success and general gifts, "the cause-effect relationships can be quite ambiguous." (p. 92).