

Avoiding Plagiarism

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the representation of the words, data, or ideas of another person as one's own work without giving the original creator due credit. This can include summarizing or paraphrasing an author's work without crediting them or representing the source accurately. Additionally, using facts that are not **common knowledge** without citing their source can be considered plagiarism.

Why Should I Cite My Work?

Accurately representing the source of ideas, data, or information prevents plagiarism, and it increases the credibility of your work. Thoroughly citing your sources indicates that you have done your research and know your topic well.

Citing Sources

The Writing Center has handouts on how to cite sources for each of the three main style guides: APA, MLA, and Chicago. Pick one up or ask a tutor for more information.

How Do I Avoid Plagiarizing?

- Plan out your paper ahead of time.
- Keep track of any ideas that are not your own.
- Thoroughly understand your source, especially when paraphrasing.
- Ask your teacher if you can reuse ideas from your own previous work; otherwise it is self-plagiarism.
- If you are unsure whether you are citing correctly, ask! There are great resources on campus, in the library, and online.
- If you do not have a References or Works Cited page, you may be plagiarizing.

What Counts as Common Knowledge? *

Common knowledge is information that the average, educated reader can assume is reliable without having to look it up.

1. **Information most people would know**, such as "human beings breathe oxygen," or "George Washington was the first President of the United States."
2. **Information shared by a cultural or national group**, such as famous people or events in the nation's history that are widely known and/or celebrated.
3. **Knowledge shared by members of a certain field**, such as the fact that the painter Caravaggio introduced tenebrism to Baroque art, which would be known by art historians.

When figuring out what is common knowledge in your work, consider who your audience is—do they belong to category 2 or 3?

Information adapted from Academic Integrity at MIT <https://integrity.mit.edu/handbook/citing-your-sources/what-common-knowledge>