

An Introduction to...

Sources, Citation, and Plagiarism

Why do we use sources?

In most academic traditions, it is important to show not only what you know, but what other established authorities have said as well. And since assigned writing is typically used by instructors to gauge a student's understanding of the topic, it is important to show how your ideas relate to (or *disagree with*) prior scholarship. This is actually cultural; in some academic traditions, it is more typical to use ideas from established authorities exclusively and expect your audience to know where these ideas originated. In our culture, scholars integrate the research of others into their work in order to participate in the "give and take" of ideas in their field. Sources may be used as evidence for your claims, as contrasting views, or as a means of establishing the state of research already conducted on the topic.

How should I incorporate sources into my writing?

There are three ways to use sources:

Direct Quotation: Repeating the exact words from a source.

Example: Smith argues, "Birds are truly foolish creatures."¹

Direct quotations provide a sense of the original source's exact meaning without interpretation and are best used when the wording from a source is especially unique, poignant, or controversial. However, avoid overusing quotations. If you can communicate the same idea just as effectively in your own words, do so. (This is called *paraphrasing*.) Whenever using unique or exact words or phrases from a source, indicate this with quotation marks, a superscript numerical citation (¹), and footnote which is formatted according to *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Paraphrase: Rewording the idea of a specific sentence or sentences from your source.

Original quotation: "Birds are truly foolish creatures."

Paraphrase example: Smith dismisses birds as lacking sound judgment.²

Paraphrase allows you to blend specific thoughts from your sources seamlessly into your own writing while still drawing support from other thinkers. Use paraphrase when you prefer to employ in your own words or when you want to avoid interrupting your narrative with quotations. Remember to cite the sources you paraphrase and be sure to use your own words and sentence structure.

Summary: Describing a large section (or the entire source) briefly in your own words.

Summary example: In “Part 1” of his *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer discusses the role of shame in motivating ethical development.³

Summary allows you to quickly refer to sources when you wish to describe an author’s main ideas rather than specific details or thoughts. In this way, you can quickly evaluate, compare, or comment on the general ideas of others. Be careful to accurately describe the ideas of the text: if summarizing a chapter or section, include that information in the footnote; if summarizing the entire source, no page numbers are necessary.

If I depend on other sources, how do I still express my own thoughts?

Think of a braid. If you braided three different colored ribbons—one representing your ideas, the other two strands representing your sources—you would have a single braid of clearly distinct strands. In the same way, your original thinking will create the main thread of your paper and interact with the other threads of your sources. When you use proper citation, your readers always know which information you borrowed and which you generated yourself.

Maintain balance. As you develop your paper, be conscious of the text’s proportion of original ideas to research. Too much borrowed material leaves no room for you to process the material and form new conclusions; the paper must still present original thinking and contribute to the scholarship of the discipline. Conversely, papers lacking research leave readers wondering how your ideas fit into the existing scholarship. Such papers suggest the author may have neglected relevant research, which weakens the paper dramatically.

What is citation?

When scholars employ the ideas, facts, or words of another source, they indicate the original source through *citation*. This is done in different ways in different academic disciplines, the differences between them largely due to scholars’ differing needs. (For example, The American Psychological Association (APA) always indicates the year of the source in-text, assuring that

the reader is conscious of emerging research regarding treatments, diagnoses, etc.) Other disciplines, including theology, often need to elaborate or explain sources further, and choose to do so via *footnotes*; this allows the text to be free of asides and parenthetical explanations while allowing the reader to find out more about the context and interpretation of sources at the bottom of the page. The seminary's format is based on *The Chicago Manual of Style* and cites sources using two steps: footnotes and bibliography.

Why do we cite sources?

1. Academic community. Your readers may want to access your sources for further research. For this reason, footnotes contain specific page numbers to point readers to the exact origin of particular borrowed material. Likewise, your alphabetized bibliography provides readers with a comprehensive list of your sources.

2. Ethical obligation. Western academia holds that any published ideas, research, and/or language produced by an author remain the property of that author. Therefore, misrepresenting material someone else has created as your own (including sources from the Internet) constitutes intellectual fraud, also known as *plagiarism*. This is a serious offense. And since it is impossible to tell whether one intentionally or accidentally fails to cite, the burden to cite accurately is on you, the writer.

Are there instances in which I don't have to cite?

Yes, but they're rare. Occasionally, if you and your audience both know where you are getting the information from, you may not have to cite so diligently. It is best to talk to your instructor about such "common knowledge" exceptions. When in doubt, cite. Over-zealous citation is preferable to a lack of citation.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional misrepresentation of ideas in academic work. It can result from either action or inaction.

Examples include:

- Forgetting to tell your reader where ideas come from.
- Accidentally misrepresenting where ideas come from.
- Intentionally attributing sources to the wrong author.
- Purposefully passing off another scholar's work or ideas as your own.

Therefore, just as we make a distinction theologically between sins of commission and sins of omission, plagiarism can result from both things we do and things we fail to do.

Why is avoiding plagiarism important?

Good scholarship requires trust. And as with any other type of relationship, the relationship between you and your audience requires that the evidence, ideas, examples and arguments that you use accurately represent your own thinking so that they can be weighed on their own merit. This is not to say that you need to be a complete genius and come up with everything by yourself; where you do rely on others' ideas, you simply need to indicate this with accurate citation. Let's look at a non-academic comparison...

Every year, the Minnesota state fair has a contest to see who can bake the best pie. There are many ingredients that could go into making these pies, so the judges require a full list of ingredients with each contestant's submission.

- Contestant One drives over to Bakers Square, buys a blueberry pie, takes it out of the box, and submits it to the contest, listing the ingredients from the side of the box on her registration form.
- Contestant Two bakes a pie using store bought ingredients, but he is disorganized and fails to submit an ingredients list.
- Contestant Three bakes a pie, but she lies about its ingredients to impress the judges, falsifying the quality, quantity, and source of the ingredients.
- Contestant Four bakes a basic pie using groceries from the store (brand name flour, commercially available sugar, etc.) and supplements these with blueberries he picked from his back yard.

So who wins the contest?

In this case, if Contestant One were to win the competition, we would all agree that it was an act of fraud. Why? Because the final product submitted does not represent her own work, and was mischievously submitted with the intention to deceive. The point of the whole competition is to see how well *you* can bake a pie—not to shop around and deliver someone else's work. And because Contestant One did not make the pie herself, she has no control over the quality of the ingredients which went into it.

Contestant Two may have produced an excellent product, but he failed to satisfy one of the requirements of the contest—an accurate list of its ingredients. And because the judges do not know what went into the final product, they cannot judge the skill of the baker. Therefore, despite the fact that the end result may have been excellent, Contestant Two does not win.

Contestant Three has submitted an inaccurate list of ingredients in an attempt to impress the judges. This disqualifies her because the contest aims to see what contestants can do with the

ingredients they use, and the ingredients listed must be intact and accurate. Why is this important? Because you want to know what exactly it is you're consuming. Therefore, it's not only about the end result, but the process and the quality of the ingredients.

And what about Contestant Four? Does he really deserve to be rewarded if his pie is somewhat inferior to the commercially-purchased pie or those with mystery ingredients or questionable provenance? According to the rules of the contest, yes! Even though Contestant Four incorporated a lot of readily available ingredients, he still took the initiative to produce some of the materials himself and used them in a way that best illustrated his ability. And since the goal of the contest is to judge who can produce the best outcome with the materials available, his submission is superior.

If we apply this (elaborate) metaphor to academic writing, we learn that...

- Scholarship is judged not only on the final results, but the process.
- One's scholarship must represent one's own ability, or it is not worth anything.
- Quality sources contribute to quality results.
- When you use others' work, you must accurately indicate those sources which aren't yours.
- In the event that you misrepresent ideas, your audience often can not tell if it is intentional or unintentional.

How do I avoid plagiarizing?

You need to cite whenever you use a source's content or ideas in your paper.

When paraphrasing, you should remember to change the wording of the text so that it is significantly different from the original; this usually involves changing nouns, verbs and word order but maintaining the original idea. For example, if an author named Ryglund notes that "Today's theological education is increasingly challenged by citation," it may become "According to Ryglund, the difficulty of citation is a growing issue for modern theological education." Note that the key nouns (names, subjects) may not always be open to manipulation without a change of meaning.

You can add even greater clarity to your use of sources by using signal phrases to indicate when you are using someone else's ideas. For example, when beginning a paraphrase or quote, indicate this (e.g. *According to Ryglund,*). Continue to indicate source use in subsequent text (e.g. *She continues on to note...* or *He further states that...*).

If you need to make any changes to a quote, do so sparingly and use editorial brackets ([]). Such changes can not alter the overall meaning of a source, and should be employed only in special

instances (ease of reading, to jump ahead a short distance within the text, etc.). For example: “Martin Luther, writing of his father, noted that ‘[Hans Luther] was always strict.’” In this instance, the square brackets may have replaced *dad* or *he*, but can not replace *Albrecht, Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg*.

Therefore, to avoid plagiarism, follow these three steps:

- First, indicate where the sources occur prior to the content by leading into the source (“According to Dr. LastName,”), followed by your quote, paraphrase, or summary.
- Next, at the end of the quoted, paraphrased or summarized material, place a superscript number (¹) outside the period at the end of the relevant section of text and install a footnote in accordance with the *Chicago Manual of Style*.
- Finally, list all sources used in a bibliography formatted in accordance with the *Chicago Manual of Style*. *

*For additional explanation of the Chicago Manual of Style, go to www.luthersem.edu/writing.