

Citation of Sources

If you use three or more consecutive words from another writer, put those words in quotation marks and cite the source. If you borrow an idea, putting the idea in completely new words and sentence structure, you must also cite. Failure to acknowledge borrowed ideas or words is plagiarism.

A college education enables you to do more than *understand* diverse sources of information and string them together; it enables you to *articulate* the issues from such sources *mostly in your own words*, using citations sparingly. You don't truly know something until you can express it in original sentences of your own.

All three forms of citation—summary, paraphrase, and quotation—require (1) a reference to the source in the body of your paper that mentions the source's author along with the page number where the borrowed material is found, and (2) a corresponding bibliographic entry with the source's publication info (publisher location and name, year, etc.), either in a separate list (Works Cited) or in a footnote (see instructor's preferences), alphabetized by author's last name.

When in doubt, it's always better to cite. Over-citation is a fault (and may lower your grade), but not citing enough is *plagiarism!*

Lead-ins for citation ought to indicate the *nature* and *extent* of your reliance upon the source; in other words, let your introductory *lead-in* itself be a summary of your summary (or paraphrase or quotation). Then at the end of your borrowed info, put the source's page number in parentheses. You need clear boundaries between where the borrowed info begins and ends, so that readers can easily distinguish between the source's material and what you have to say about it.

- For quoting use either:
 - *Signal phrase*: a short intro that is not a complete thought (not a clause).
 - According to Smith, “~~~~~” (48).
 - *Lead-in*: a complete sentence that introduces the source. Use whole name on 1st mention
 - Bill Sykes, a professor of history at NYU, writes, “~~~~~” (45). Use author's credentials to establish credibility and authority.
- Connect *lead-ins* with a colon to block quotes or when quoting a complete sentence.
 - Smith identifies several salutary effects of interval training: “~~~~~” (56).

It is usually best (for interdisciplinary papers and for general audiences) to indicate not only who you are citing but also why their opinion is worth hearing. To do this, include their credentials in the lead in: *Diana Eck, Professor of Islamic Studies at Harvard, argues, “blah blah blah” (Islam in Context 61)*. This shows the reader that the person cited has some authority to speak on the topic as an expert.

On the other hand, read this note on the difference between plagiarism and borrowing your own company's verbiage, particularly "boilerplate" descriptions for press releases or for in-house documentation. The question to ask is whether your reader would expect your words to be your own throughout, as in the case of an original proposal (in that case, you'd better quote anything that you borrow with quotation marks!). When in doubt, it's always better to cite your sources!

Ethics Note

Distinguishing Plagiarism from Acceptable Reuse of Information

Plagiarism is the act of using someone else's words or ideas without giving credit to the original author. It doesn't matter whether the writer intended to plagiarize. Obviously, it is plagiarism to borrow, buy, or steal graphics, video or audio media, written passages, or entire documents and then use them without attribution. Web-based sources are particularly vulnerable to plagiarism, partly because people mistakenly think that if information is on the Web, it is free to borrow, and partly because it is so easy to copy, paste, and reformat this material.

However, writers in the working world often reuse a source's information without giving the source credit—and that may be completely ethical. For instance, a company writes press releases when it wishes to publicize news. These press releases typically conclude with a description of the company and how to get in touch with an employee who can answer questions about the company's products or services. This description, sometimes called *boilerplate*, is simply copied and pasted from previous press releases. Because the description is legally the intellectual property of the company, reusing it in this way is completely honest. Similarly, a company often *repurposes* its writing. That is, an employee copies a description of the company from a press release and pastes it into a proposal or an annual report. This reuse also is acceptable.

When you are writing a document and need a passage that you suspect someone in your organization might already have written, ask a more-experienced co-worker whether the culture of your organization permits reusing someone else's writing. If the answer is yes, check with your supervisor to see whether he or she approves of what you plan to do.

from Mike Markel, *Technical Communication*, 9th edition, Bedford St Martins, 2010. Page 28.