



A Student's Guide to Understanding Academic Citation

If you've made it this far, you've probably come across the term **plagiarism** before, and maybe you've even been asked to do assignments requiring academic citation. Many students unintentionally plagiarize when they write reports and research papers, often because they don't actually understand what plagiarism is.

Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional use of another person's language, ideas, or inventions without attribution. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- **Buying, stealing, or borrowing** a paper (including copying an entire paper or article from the internet)
- **Hiring someone** to write your paper for you
- **Copying** large sections of text from a source without quotation marks or proper citation
- Using the words of a source too closely when paraphrasing where quotation marks should have been used
- Building on someone's ideas - even in your own words - without citing their spoken or written work.

Plagiarism amounts to stealing someone else's work and claiming it as your own – the equivalent of cheating on a test. Academic standards of intellectual honesty are demanding: professors and administrators generally don't accept "I didn't know" as a reason for plagiarizing, and you will be responsible for your actions when you get caught.

Why Do Students Plagiarize?

There are many reasons why students turn to cheating. Following are some of the most common, along with suggestions for making good decisions when you're faced with these situations.

- **Stress** – you're a good student, but maybe you left an assignment until the last minute. Or, you feel immense pressure to earn an A but don't have nearly enough time to do it right.
 - Talk to your professor about an extension – he or she may deduct points for lateness, but that is infinitely better than failing the course for plagiarism.
 - The Dean of Students office offers free clinical counseling for students dealing with issues such as stress, personal or professional concerns, or financial issues.
 - The AAC can help you develop a personal time management plan.
- **Confusion** – Many students don't know what to cite sources or assess internet sources for validity. The age of the internet means there is a great deal of information available very quickly and easily, and often there is no author attached to sources on the web.
 - Ask your professor, a librarian, or a tutor at the AAC for help with citing internet sources.
 - Search the internet for citation guides – they're just as easy to find as the information you're using in your paper! Try **MLA.org** or **APA.org**.

- **Panic** – you're totally overwhelmed with work and put a paper together in a hurry, maybe cutting and pasting some material without taking the time to properly cite it.
 - Ask for an extension, find your sources, and get the citations right, OR
 - Remove non-cited material from your paper, even if it means you won't make length or citation number requirements. A lower grade is better than failure!
 - In the future: the AAC can help you with time management and provide you with guidance on academic citation.
 - When taking notes and researching your topic, do so carefully and systematically (see "Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism"). The time spent doing this is well worth it.

- **Frustration** – you don't understand the assignment, you don't like the class or your paper topic, the work is a waste of time, you have other obligations, or you just don't care about the class, so you throw something together from your sources, with some transitions mixed in.
 - Ask your professor, a classmate, or a tutor at the AAC for help. They can help you understand the assignment and why it has value to your learning.
 - Remember, some of the most successful students are not the brightest, but those who know how to seek assistance when they need it.

Lawrence Tech Honor Code

Lawrence Tech's academic honor code, to which all enrolled students are subject, stipulates that committing plagiarism is an academic honesty offense, subject to the following disciplinary actions:

- The infraction is discovered by or reported to the course instructor
- The instructor reports the occurrence to the department chair or dean of the college, who will conduct an investigation
- The student will be informed in writing of the plagiarism charge and asked to furnish a written response to the charge
- The student may be required to meet with the chair or dean
- If the student is found to have plagiarized, the student will receive an F grade in the course
 - this grade will not be recomputed for GPA purposes
 - the student will be informed in writing of the violation finding
 - a copy of the letter will be placed in the student's file
- A student found guilty of a second violation of the honor code he or she will be expelled from the university.
- There is an appeals process and proceedings for expulsion per the Honor Code adjudication process.

Student Pledge

Members of the Lawrence Tech student community recognize that academic integrity is a fundamental value of the University community. Students agree to hold themselves and their peers to the highest standards of academic honesty by including the following pledge on all written work submitted for a class:

"I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in completing this work, nor have I presented someone else's work as my own."

By now, you should be sufficiently convinced that plagiarism is a serious issue that deserves your attention.

So, when should you give credit?

The **OWL at Purdue** (a great resource for writers!) put together the following list to help you understand what kinds of information and data sources need to be documented:

- Words or ideas presented in a magazine, book, newspaper, song, TV program, movie, Web page, computer program, letter, advertisement, or any other medium
- Information you gain through interviewing or conversing with another person, face to face, over the phone, or in writing
- When you copy the exact words or a unique phrase
- When you reprint any diagrams, illustrations, charts, pictures, or other visual materials
- When you reuse or repost any electronically-available media, including images, audio, video, or other media

Bottom line, document any words, ideas, or other productions that originate somewhere outside of you. There are, of course, certain things that do not need documentation or credit, including:

- Writing your own lived experiences, your own observations and insights, your own thoughts, and your own conclusions about a subject
- When you are writing up your own results obtained through lab or field experiments
- When you use your own artwork, digital photographs, video, audio, etc.
- When you are using "common knowledge," things like folklore, common sense observations, myths, urban legends, and historical events (but **not** historical documents)
- When you are using generally-accepted facts, e.g., pollution is bad for the environment, including facts that are accepted within particular discourse communities, e.g., in the field of composition studies, "writing is a process" is a generally-accepted fact.

Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism

Take the time to properly learn how to cite sources, paraphrase, summarize, and quote.

When taking notes, always write down complete bibliographic information and employ a system to ensure that you know you are copying a quote. For instance, you can use a highlighter and write a big "Q" over the text you've copied and "ME" over notes about information you've synthesized (your own thoughts).

When summarizing, use a statement that credits the source somewhere in the paraphrase or summary, such as: *According to Jonathan Kozol, children who eat breakfast are six times more likely to...*

Check your paraphrase or summary against the original text; correct any errors in content accuracy, and be sure to use quotation marks to set off any exact phrases from the original text.

Put quotation marks around any unique words or phrases that you cannot or do not want to change, e.g., "savage inequalities" exist throughout our educational system (Kozol).

When using a direct quote, keep the source author's name in the same sentence as the quote and always use quotation marks. Quote no more material than is necessary; if a short phrase from a source will suffice, don't quote an entire paragraph.

Talk to your professor, a librarian, an AAC tutor, or one of your classmates about how to properly cite sources. You are part of a community of learners who want to help you learn.

If you're not sure you're citing correctly or that you even need to cite, always err on the side of caution and include a citation.

Proofread and cross-check with your notes and sources to make sure that anything coming from an outside source is acknowledged.

If you have any questions about citation, ask your instructor **well in advance** of your paper's due date, so if you have to make any adjustments to your citations, you have the time to do them well.

Protect your own intellectual property by password protecting your computer, and locking it when you need to step away. Maintain copies of your drafts in various media.

Save your work as different drafts (i.e., paper1.docx, paper2.docx) at various stages of the writing process; this way, in the event you are accused of plagiarism, you can demonstrate the progress of your writing.

Check out the resources at the AAC website under "Writing Center." There are downloadable guides on how to paraphrase, cite sources using MLA format, and evaluate internet sources, common knowledge, and argumentation – with more resources coming soon!

How Your Professors Can Help You

If you're under pressure and copying or buying a paper seems like the only or best solution, stop and think for a minute. Contact your professor and request an extension. Explain your situation and request guidance. Be honest – remember, your professors want to help you learn.

Professors should review the academic honor code at the start of the semester with the class, and it should also be mentioned in the syllabus.

Professors should provide you with clear guidelines about what they are expecting in an assignment and how they will grade the assignment. If you are given an assignment which is unclear, ask the professor right away to clarify what he or she is expecting. Chances are, if you are confused about the assignment, other students are, too.

The Blackboard interface includes the plagiarism detection program **SafeAssign**. This program detects unoriginal work in your paper by comparing the work to that on the internet and a database of papers submitted by other Lawrence Tech students (including yourself). Requiring students to submit assignments electronically using SafeAssign helps your professors deter plagiarism and educate students about proper citation of sources.

References

"Avoiding Plagiarism." The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University Accessed 29 June 2009.
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/04/>

"Avoiding Plagiarism." Clemson University Libraries. Accessed 29 June 2009.
<http://www.lib.clemson.edu/Plagiarism/warningsigns.htm>