Why is it important to cite your sources?

It is important to keep the ideas of your sources separated from your own ideas in your research. Anything that is not cited will be assumed to be your own idea. When you cite properly you are treating your sources fairly by giving credit where it's rightfully due. This system allows your reader to see where you got your ideas and s/he will be able to easily find them with good citations. Also, your bibliography is proof that you have done you research, which gives you greater authority to make assertions on the topic.

When can I get into trouble?

Here are some common examples of how students commit plagiarism:

1. When you do not use quotation marks to indicate a direct quote from a source.
2. When you do not use your own words and sentence structure to paraphrase a source.
3. Forgetting parenthetical citations.
4. By misplacing your parenthetical citations. The most common mistake is that you place your citation before divulging all of a source’s ideas.
5. Relying almost entirely on just one source.
6. Forgetting to cite phrases or ideas from any media, any interview information, exact words or unique ideas, pictures, charts, graphs, etc., or when reposting electronic media online.

How should I examine more sources?

College-level research isn’t like leisure reading and isn’t always easy to comprehend. Doing research means you are looking for sources that are not only relevant but also answer questions that are raised by your argument. So researching isn’t skimming through sources and picking up bits that happen to agree with your thesis! Your reader will think that all of the sources in your References list are documents that you have read in full (in most cases) and understand fully. While you are reading and the purpose of a document is hard to understand, try summarizing the main points and following the argument as best you can as you work your way through. Then look at each source as a whole and reflect on its purpose. What is the author really saying? Make judgments on the evidence presented.

How can taking good notes help?

Here are some pointers on good note-taking:

1. Start by writing the author, title and publication date at the top of the page. Give each source its own notes page so that you can’t mix them up later.
2. Use a different pen or font color for your own ideas as inspiration strikes so that they are distinguishable.
3. When quoting directly, use quotation marks in your notes.
4. When paraphrasing, close the book or minimize the browser to avoid using the source’s words. Paraphrasing also means that you aren’t using the source’s sentence structure.

Here is an example of good paraphrasing and quoting:


It seems to me, however, that the rush to condemn asks of plagiarism risks riding roughshod over a problem that may turn out to be far more complex—behaviorally, ethically, conceptually, and even linguistically – than has been previously granted.

Paraphrased and quoted in student research:

According to Briggs (2009, p. 65), treating students who are guilty of plagiarism harshly overlooks a greater problem that may actually be “behaviorally, ethically, conceptually... [or] linguistically” based rather than one of moral or ethical character.

When is the best time to quote?

Be sparing with your quotes when you can. Generally, when taking notes you should mostly paraphrase a source. If you have too many quotes in your paper it may seem that you have nothing to say yourself!

Instances in which to quote

1. Your quote comes from an expert who directly and succinctly supports your thesis.
2. Your quote comes from an expert who deviates from the norm or from everything else you've found in your research.
3. Your source's working is so poignant that deviation would diminish the impact of the idea.

As you can see, the problem of plagiarism has more depth to it than simply a student copying from a source, pasting it into a Word document and typing his or her name at the top of the page. Preventing plagiarism in your writing means that you need to be mindful of your sources; not only in how you put them together into a cohesive paper but also whether you treat each one fairly. Citing the places where you paraphrase and quote in your paper will make your research apparent to your reader, too, and help him or her to track down where the basis of your ideas comes from.

Questions? Contact Grace Library
412-578-6139
gracelibrary@carlow.edu
www.carlow.edu/library
Follow us on Twitter http://twitter.com/carlowlibrary