Avoiding Plagiarism

Note: These reference guides do not take the place of assignment guidelines

What is Plagiarism?

According to FGCU's Office of Student Conduct, Plagiarism is defined as when "another's work is deliberately used or appropriated without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own" (Academic Behavior Standards B). Plagiarism occurs anytime you present another person's ideas as your own, without giving proper credit to the original creator of the material.

How to Avoid Plagiarism?

Cite your sources!
The easiest way to avoid plagiarism is to cite your sources. Whenever you use something that is not your own original idea, you need to acknowledge the source. There is no such thing as "over citing" in an essay, so when in doubt, cite.

What do I need to cite?

- Whenever you are using ideas taken from a source, such as a scholarly article, book, or lecture, whether you directly quote specific words or phrases or paraphrase them into your own words
- When you use diagrams or images you have borrowed from a source
- When you use specific terminology or phrases that are pulled from your source that were created by the author of the original source
- Your own original work, which you are repurposing as a new product (ie. Making revisions to an old essay and then submitting in response to a new essay prompt, with permission from a professor)

What do I *not* need to cite?

- Results obtained from experiments or surveys that you conducted
- Your own, original work, which you are NOT repurposing as a new product
- Your own personal experiences, thoughts, or observations (ie. Writing a personal reflection about an important time in your life, your own analysis of a source)
- Information that can be considered "common knowledge"

How to determine if something is common knowledge?

"Common knowledge" is comprised of information that is considered generally well known by your audience. What counts as common knowledge will vary based upon who your audience is, so it is important to keep in mind that what might be common knowledge to some is not common to others. Some examples of common knowledge are:

- Information that can be found, undocumented, in at least *five* credible sources
- Facts that are considered generally known or accepted by your audience
  - This will vary based on your audience. For example, it is generally known by people who live in Florida that alligators might live in nearby bodies of water. People who are not from Florida, however, might not know how prevalent gators actually are, and would need to have this explained first.
- Fairy tales, folk tales, urban legends, and well known historical events
  - This will vary based on your audience. For example, the urban legend of alligators living in the sewers of New York is not going to be common knowledge for someone unfamiliar with New York, alligators, or the United States.

As with all other information, even when using "common knowledge," **if there is any doubt, cite it!**

How do I cite my sources?

How you cite your sources is going to depend on what style of formatting you are using. This guide will give a brief overview of general citation guidelines. For more information on your specific formatting style please see the Writing Center's format specific handouts.

Citing when Paraphrasing and Summarizing

Paraphrasing is putting a specific passage from another person's work into "your own words," or language that you believe your audience will better understand. Summarizing is taking a larger passage or complete work and giving an overview that focuses only on the parts that are most important to your own argument or claim. When you are paraphrasing or summarizing, you can give credit to the original author by:

- Telling your reader who the original source is within the paraphrase or summary (ie. According to reptile expert Alexandria Ayala, gators in the New York sewer system are highly unlikely)
- Check your paraphrase or summary against the original text to make sure that the information is both accurate and in your own words. If you use any terms or phrases directly from the source, place them in quotation marks.
- Place an in-text citation at the end of the paraphrase or summary. You must do this *even if you have put the original text into your own words*, because it is the ideas you have to cite, not just the words themselves.

Direct Quotes

A direct quote is taking a term, phrase, or section of the text and using it within your work word-for-word. When you are using direct quotes, you can give credit to the author by:

- Placing the direct quote inside quotation marks to indicate that phrase is someone else's original words. (For longer quotations, you may instead use a "block quote" to indicate a direct quotation of the material. See your specific format's guidelines for when to use a block quote.)
- As with a paraphrase or summary, introduce the direct quote by telling your reader who the original source was (ie. According to sewer expert Kelsey Fischell, "Alligators would have a difficult time making their homes in the sewers.")
- Place an in-text citation at the end of the direct quote, using the guidelines for your specific format.

Remember:

- **If you are unsure whether or not something needs to be cited, cite it**. You can never "over cite."
- If you ever have any questions about citations, citations styles, or plagiarism, drop by the Writing Center!