Avoiding Plagiarism

When you write papers in college, your work is held to the same standards of citation as the work of your professors. Your professors observe these conventions for two reasons: First, citing sources allows scholars to give credit to other scholars for their hard work and their ideas. Second, by citing sources, scholars provide a roadmap for readers who are interested in learning more about a topic and joining the ongoing conversation about that topic.

When you fail to cite your sources, or when you cite them inadequately, you are plagiarizing, which is taken extremely seriously at Harvard. Plagiarism is defined as the act of either intentionally OR unintentionally submitting work that was written by someone else. If you turn in a paper that was written by someone else, or if you turn in a paper in which you have included material from any source without citing that source, you have plagiarized. As you begin your Harvard career, it's important to take the time to understand what constitutes plagiarism, why plagiarism is considered such a serious offense, and how to avoid plagiarizing in your own writing.

In addition to making sure you understand the material in this section, you should also consult departmental guides for additional information relevant to expectations in different courses you take, both in your concentration and in other departments. You should also be familiar with Harvard's official policy on plagiarism and collaboration and the Harvard College Honor Code.

What Constitutes Plagiarism?

In academic writing, it is considered plagiarism to draw any idea or any language from someone else without adequately crediting that source in your paper. It doesn't matter whether the source is a published author, another student, a website without clear authorship, a website that sells academic papers, or any other person: Taking credit for anyone else's work is stealing, and it is unacceptable in all academic situations, whether you do it intentionally or by accident.

The ease with which you can find information of all kinds online means that you need to be extra vigilant about keeping track of where you are getting information and ideas and about giving proper credit to the authors of the sources you use. If you cut and paste from an electronic document into your notes and forget to clearly label the document in your notes, or if you draw information from a series of websites without taking careful notes, you may end up taking credit for ideas that aren't yours, whether you mean to or not.

It's important to remember that every website is a document with an author, and therefore every website must be cited properly in your paper. For example, while it may seem obvious to you that an idea drawn from Professor Steven Pinker's book *The Language Instinct* should only appear in your paper if you include a clear citation, it might be less clear that information you glean about language acquisition from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy website warrants a similar citation. Even though the authorship of this encyclopedia entry is less obvious than it might be if it were a print article (you need to scroll down the page to see the author's name, and if you don't do so you might mistakenly think an author isn't listed), you are still responsible for citing this material correctly. Similarly, if you consult a website that has no clear authorship, you are still responsible for citing the website as a source for your paper. The kind of source you use, or the absence of an author linked to that source, does not change the fact that you always need to cite your sources (see Evaluating Web Sources).

While it may seem obvious that copying someone else's words verbatim and submitting them in a paper with your name on it is plagiarism, other types of plagiarism may be less familiar to you. These more subtle forms of plagiarism are actually more common, and you should make sure you understand all of them, as well as how to avoid them by conducting your research and writing carefully and responsibly.

Verbatim Plagiarism

If you copy language word for word from another source and use that language in your paper, you are plagiarizing *verbatim*. Even if you write down your own ideas in your own words and place them around text that you've drawn directly from a source, you *must* give credit to the

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author of the source material, either by placing the source material in quotation marks and providing a clear citation, or by paraphrasing the source material and providing a clear citation.

Example

The passage below comes from Ellora Derenoncourt's article, "Can You Move to Opportunity? Evidence from the Great Migration."

Here is the article citation in APA style:

> Derenoncourt, E. (2022). Can you move to opportunity? Evidence from the Great
>
> Migration. *The American Economic Review*, 112(2), 369–408.
>
> https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20200002

Source material

> Why did urban Black populations in the North increase so dramatically between 1940 and 1970? After a period of reduced mobility during the Great Depression, Black out-migration from the South resumed at an accelerated pace after 1940. Wartime jobs in the defense industry and in naval shipyards led to substantial Black migration to California and other Pacific states for the first time since the Migration began. Migration continued apace to midwestern cities in the 1950s and1960s, as the booming automobile industry attracted millions more Black southerners to the North, particularly to cities like Detroit or Cleveland. Of the six million Black migrants who left the South during the Great Migration, four million of them migrated between 1940 and 1970 alone.

Plagiarized version

While this student has written her own sentence introducing the topic, she has copied the italicized sentences directly from the source material. She has left out two sentences from Derenoncourt's paragraph, but has reproduced the rest verbatim:

> But things changed mid-century. *After a period of reduced mobility during the Great Depression, Black out-migration from the South resumed at an accelerated pace after 1940. Wartime jobs in the defense industry and in naval shipyards led to substantial Black migration to California and other Pacific states for the first time since the Migration began. Migration continued apace to midwestern cities in the 1950s and1960s, as the booming automobile industry attracted millions more Black southerners to the North, particularly to cities like Detroit or Cleveland.*

Acceptable version #1: Paraphrase with citation

In this version the student has paraphrased Derenoncourt's passage, making it clear that these ideas come from a source by introducing the section with a clear signal phrase ("as Derenoncourt explains…") and citing the publication date, as APA style requires.

> But things changed mid-century. In fact, as Derenoncourt (2022) explains, the wartime increase in jobs in both defense and naval shipyards marked the first time during the Great Migration that Black southerners went to California and other west coast states. After the war, the increase in jobs in the car industry led to Black southerners choosing cities in the midwest, including Detroit and Cleveland.

Acceptable version #2: Direct quotation with citation or direct quotation and paraphrase with citation

If you quote directly from an author and cite the quoted material, you are giving credit to the author. But you should keep in mind that quoting long passages of text is only the best option if the particular language used by the author is important to your paper. Social scientists and STEM scholars rarely quote in their writing, paraphrasing their sources instead. If you are writing in the humanities, you should make sure that you only quote directly when you think it is important for your readers to see the original language.

In the example below, the student quotes part of the passage and paraphrases the rest.

> But things changed mid-century. In fact, as Derenoncourt (2022) explains, "after a period of reduced mobility during the Great Depression, Black out-migration from the South resumed at an accelerated pace after 1940" (p. 379). Derenoncourt notes that after the war, the increase in jobs in the car industry led to Black southerners choosing cities in the midwest, including Detroit and Cleveland.

Mosaic Plagiarism

If you copy bits and pieces from a source (or several sources), changing a few words here and there without either adequately paraphrasing or quoting directly, the result is *mosaic plagiarism*. Even if you don't intend to copy the source, you may end up with this type of plagiarism as a result of careless note-taking and confusion over where your source's ideas end and your own ideas begin. You may think that you've paraphrased sufficiently or quoted relevant passages, but if you haven't taken careful notes along the way, or if you've cut and pasted from your sources, you can lose track of the boundaries between your own ideas and those of your sources. It's not enough to have good intentions and to cite some of the material you use. You are responsible for

making clear distinctions between your ideas and the ideas of the scholars who have informed your work. If you keep track of the ideas that come from your sources and have a clear understanding of how your own ideas differ from those ideas, and you follow the correct citation style, you will avoid mosaic plagiarism.

Example

Source #1

> Indeed, of the more than 3500 hours of instruction during medical school, an average of less than 60 hours are devoted to all of bioethics, health law and health economics *combined*. Most of the instruction is during the preclinical courses, leaving very little instructional time when students are experiencing bioethical or legal challenges during their hands-on, clinical training. More than 60 percent of the instructors in bioethics, health law, and health economics have not published since 1990 on the topic they are teaching.
>
> --Persad, G.C., Elder, L., Sedig,L., Flores, L., & Emanuel, E. (2008). The current state of medical school education in bioethics, health law, and health economics. *Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics 36*, 89-94.

Source #2

> Students can absorb the educational messages in medical dramas when they view them for entertainment. In fact, even though they were not created specifically for education, these programs can be seen as an entertainment-education tool [43, 44]. In entertainment-education shows, viewers are exposed to educational content in entertainment contexts, using visual language that is easy to understand and triggers emotional engagement [45]. The enhanced emotional engagement and cognitive development [5] and moral imagination make students more sensitive to training [22].
>
> --Cambra-Badii, I., Moyano, E., Ortega, I., Josep-E Baños, & Sentí, M. (2021). TV medical dramas: Health sciences students' viewing habits and potential for teaching issues related to bioethics and professionalism. *BMC Medical Education, 21*, 1-11. doi:https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-021-02947-7

Plagiarized version

Paragraph #1.

All of the ideas in this paragraph after the first sentence are drawn directly from Persad. But because the student has placed the citation mid-paragraph, the final two sentences wrongly appear to be the student's own idea:

> In order to advocate for the use of medical television shows in the medical education system, it is also important to look at the current bioethical curriculum. In the more than 3500 hours of training that students undergo in medical school, only about 60 hours are focused on bioethics, health law, and health economics (Persad et al, 2008). It is also problematic that students receive this training before they actually have spent time treating patients in the clinical setting. Most of these hours are taught by instructors without current publications in the field.

Paragraph #2.

All of the italicized ideas in this paragraph are either paraphrased or taken verbatim from Cambra-Badii, et al., but the student does not cite the source at all. As a result, readers will assume that the student has come up with these ideas himself:

> *Students can absorb the educational messages in medical dramas when they view them for entertainment. It doesn't matter if the shows were designed for medical students; they can still be a tool for education. In these hybrid entertainment–education shows, viewers are exposed to educational content that triggers an emotional reaction. By allowing for this emotional, cognitive, and moral engagement, the shows make students more sensitive to training.* There may be further applications to this type of education: the role of entertainment as a way of encouraging students to consider ethical situations could be extended to other professions, including law or even education.

The student has come up with the final idea in the paragraph (that this type of ethical training could apply to other professions), but because nothing in the paragraph is cited, it reads as if it is part of a whole paragraph of his own ideas, rather than the point that he is building to after using the ideas from the article without crediting the authors.

Acceptable version

In the first paragraph, the student uses signal phrases in nearly every sentence to reference the authors ("According to Persad et al.," "As the researchers argue," "They also note"), which makes it clear throughout the paragraph that all of the paragraph's information has been drawn from Persad et al. The student also uses a clear APA in-text citation to point the reader to the original

article. In the second paragraph, the student paraphrases and cites the source's ideas and creates a clear boundary behind those ideas and his own, which appear in the final paragraph.

> In order to advocate for the use of medical television shows in the medical education system, it is also important to look at the current bioethical curriculum. According to Persad et al. (2008), only about one percent of teaching time throughout the four years of medical school is spent on ethics. As the researchers argue, this presents a problem because the students are being taught about ethical issues before they have a chance to experience those issues themselves. They also note that more than sixty percent of instructors teaching bioethics to medical students have no recent publications in the subject.

> The research suggests that medical dramas may be a promising source for discussions of medical ethics. Cambra-Badii et al. (2021) explain that even when watched for entertainment, medical shows can help viewers engage emotionally with the characters and may prime them to be more receptive to training in medical ethics. There may be further applications to this type of education: the role of entertainment as a way of encouraging students to consider ethical situations could be extended to other professions, including law or even education.

Inadequate Paraphrase

When you paraphrase, your task is to distill the source's ideas in your own words. It's not enough to change a few words here and there and leave the rest; instead, you must completely restate the ideas in the passage in your own words. If your own language is too close to the original, then you are plagiarizing, even if you do provide a citation.

In order to make sure that you are using your own words, it's a good idea to put away the source material while you write your paraphrase of it. This way, you will force yourself to distill the point you think the author is making and articulate it in a new way. Once you have done this, you should look back at the original and make sure that you have represented the source's ideas accurately and that you have not used the same words or sentence structure. If you do want to use some of the author's words for emphasis or clarity, you must put those words in quotation marks and provide a citation.

Example

Source material

The passage below comes from Michael Sandel's article, "The Case Against Perfection." Here's the article citation in MLA style:

> Sandel, Michael. "The Case Against Perfection." *The Atlantic*, April
>
> > 2004, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/04/the-case-against-
> >
> > perfection/302927.

> Though there is much to be said for this argument, I do not think the main problem with enhancement and genetic engineering is that they undermine effort and erode human agency. The deeper danger is that they represent a kind of hyperagency—a Promethean aspiration to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires. The problem is not the drift to mechanism but the drive to mastery. And what the drive to mastery misses and may even destroy is an appreciation of the gifted character of human powers and achievements.

Plagiarized version

The version below is an inadequate paraphrase because the student has only cut or replaced a few words: "I do not think the main problem" became "the main problem is not"; "deeper danger" became "bigger problem"; "aspiration" became "desire"; "the gifted character of human powers and achievements" became "the gifts that make our achievements possible."

> The main problem with enhancement and genetic engineering is not that they undermine effort and erode human agency. The bigger problem is that they represent a kind of hyperagency—a Promethean desire to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires. The problem is not the drift to mechanism but the drive to mastery. And what the drive to mastery misses and may even destroy is an appreciation of the gifts that make our achievements possible (Sandel).

Acceptable version #1: Adequate paraphrase with citation

In this version, the student communicates Sandel's ideas but does not borrow language from Sandel. Because the student uses Sandel's name in the first sentence and has consulted an online version of the article without page numbers, there is no need for a parenthetical citation.

Michael Sandel disagrees with the argument that genetic engineering is a problem because it replaces the need for humans to work hard and make their own choices. Instead, he argues that we should be more concerned that the decision to use genetic enhancement is motivated by a desire to take control of nature and bend it to our will instead of appreciating its gifts.

Acceptable version #2: Direct quotation with citation

In this version, the student uses Sandel's words in quotation marks and provides a clear MLA in-text citation. In cases where you are going to talk about the exact language that an author uses, it is acceptable to quote longer passages of text. If you are not going to discuss the exact language, you should paraphrase rather than quoting extensively.

The author argues that "the main problem with enhancement and genetic engineering is not that they undermine effort and erode human agency," but, rather that "they represent a kind of hyperagency—a Promethean desire to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires. The problem is not the drift to mechanism but the drive to mastery. And what the drive to mastery misses and may even destroy is an appreciation of the gifts that make our achievements possible" (Sandel).

Uncited Paraphrase

When you use your own language to describe someone else's idea, that idea still belongs to the author of the original material. Therefore, it's not enough to paraphrase the source material responsibly; you also need to cite the source, even if you have changed the wording significantly. As with quoting, when you paraphrase you are offering your reader a glimpse of someone else's work on your chosen topic, and you should also provide enough information for your reader to trace that work back to its original form. The rule of thumb here is simple: Whenever you use ideas that you did not think up yourself, you need to give credit to the source in which you found them, whether you quote directly from that material or provide a responsible paraphrase.

Example

Source material

The passage below comes from C. Thi Nguyen's article, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles."

Here's the citation for the article, in APA style:

Nguyen, C. (2020). Echo chambers and epistemic bubbles. *Episteme, 17*(2), 141-161.

doi:10.1017/epi.2018.32

Epistemic bubbles can easily form accidentally. But the most plausible explanation for the particular features of echo chambers is something more malicious. Echo chambers are excellent tools to maintain, reinforce, and expand power through epistemic control. Thus, it is likely (though not necessary) that echo chambers are set up intentionally, or at least maintained, for this functionality (Nguyen, 2020).

Plagiarized version

The student who wrote the paraphrase below has drawn these ideas directly from Nguyen's article but has not credited the author. Although she paraphrased adequately, she is still responsible for citing Nguyen as the source of this information.

Echo chambers and epistemic bubbles have different origins. While epistemic bubbles can be created organically, it's more likely that echo chambers will be formed by those who wish to keep or even grow their control over the information that people hear and understand.

Acceptable version

In this version, the student eliminates any possible ambiguity about the source of the ideas in the paragraph. By using a signal phrase to name the author whenever the source of the ideas could be unclear, the student clearly attributes these ideas to Nguyen.

According to Nguyen (2020), echo chambers and epistemic bubbles have different origins. Nguyen argues that while epistemic bubbles can be created organically, it's more likely that echo chambers will be formed by those who wish to keep or even grow their control over the information that people hear and understand.

Uncited Quotation

When you put source material in quotation marks in your essay, you are telling your reader that you have drawn that material from somewhere else. But it's not enough to indicate that the material in quotation marks is not the product of your own thinking or experimentation: You must also credit the author of that material and provide a trail for your reader to follow back to

the original document. This way, your reader will know who did the original work and will also be able to go back and consult that work if they are interested in learning more about the topic. Citations should always go directly after quotations.

Example

Source material

The passage below comes from Deirdre Mask's nonfiction book, *The Address Book: What Street Addresses Reveal About Identity, Race, Wealth, and Power.*

Here is the MLA citation for the book:

> Mask, Deirdre. *The Address Book: What Street Addresses Reveal About Identity, Race,*
>
> *Wealth, and Power.* St. Martin's Griffin, 2021.

> In New York, even addresses are for sale. The city allows a developer, for the bargain price of $11,000 (as of 2019), to apply to change the street address to something more attractive.

Plagiarized version

It's not enough for the student to indicate that these words come from a source; the source must be cited:

> After all, "in New York, even addresses are for sale. The city allows a developer, for the bargain price of $11,000 (as of 2019), to apply to change the street address to something more attractive."

Acceptable version

Here, the student has cited the source of the quotation using an MLA in-text citation:

> After all, "in New York, even addresses are for sale. The city allows a developer, for the bargain price of $11,000 (as of 2019), to apply to change the street address to something more attractive" (Mask 229).

Using Material from Another Student's Work

In some courses you will be allowed or encouraged to form study groups, to work together in class generating ideas, or to collaborate on your thinking in other ways. Even in those cases, it's imperative that you understand whether all of your writing must be done independently, or whether group authorship is permitted. Most often, even in courses that allow some collaborative discussion, the writing or calculations that you do must be your own. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't collect feedback on your writing from a classmate or a writing tutor; rather, it means that the argument you make (and the ideas you rely on to make it) should either be your own or you should give credit to the source of those ideas.

So what does this mean for the ideas that emerge from class discussion or peer review exercises? Unlike the ideas that your professor offers in lecture (you should always cite these), ideas that come up in the course of class discussion or peer review are collaborative, and often not just the product of one individual's thinking. If, however, you see a clear moment in discussion when a particular student comes up with an idea, you should cite that student. In any case, when your work is informed by class discussions, it's courteous and collegial to include a discursive footnote in your paper that lets your readers know about that discussion. So, for example, if you were writing a paper about the narrator in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* and you came up with your idea during a discussion in class, you might place a footnote in your paper that states the following: "I am indebted to the members of my Expos 20 section for sparking my thoughts about the role of the narrator as Greek Chorus in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*."

It is important to note that collaboration policies can vary by course, even within the same department, and you are responsible for familiarizing yourself with each course's expectation about collaboration. Collaboration policies are often stated in the syllabus, but if you are not sure whether it is appropriate to collaborate on work for any course, you should always consult your instructor.

The Exception: Common Knowledge

The only source material that you can use in an essay without attribution is material that is considered common knowledge and is therefore not attributable to one source. Common knowledge is information generally known to an educated reader, such as widely known facts and dates, and, more rarely, ideas or language. Facts, ideas, and language that are distinct and unique products of a particular individual's work do not count as common knowledge and must always be cited. Figuring out whether something is common knowledge can be tricky, and it's always better to cite a source if you're not sure whether the information or idea is common knowledge. If you err on the side of caution, the worst outcome would be that an instructor would tell you that you didn't need to cite; if you don't cite, you could end up with a larger problem.

If you have encountered the information in multiple sources but still think you should cite it, cite the source you used that you think is most reliable, or the one that has shaped your thinking the most. You can also cite multiple sources to give your readers more context for a scholarly debate or conversation.

Categories of Common Knowledge

Widely known facts

Widely known scientific and historical facts—such as the molecular structure of water (H_2O), or that Andrew Jackson was the seventh president of the United States—generally count as common knowledge. You can include such facts in your writing without citation and without fear of plagiarizing. Other facts that count as common knowledge—for instance, that Franz Boas, the American ethnologist, held the first academic appointment in anthropology in the United States—are widely known to some groups of people (professional anthropologists) but perhaps not to you. Nevertheless, you would not have to cite the fact about Boas, since it is common knowledge in the sense that no particular individual discovered this information (say, through archival research at Columbia University, where Boas taught). On the other hand, as soon as your discussion becomes more specific and offers assertions that would be the product of an individual's thought, research, or analysis, you do have to cite. For example, if you read Anthony Abraham Jack's *The Privileged Poor* and then wrote about the conclusions he drew from his study of economically disadvantaged students at elite colleges, you would need to cite his work.
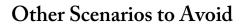
Ideas or interpretations are usually not considered common knowledge, unless they are very widely held.

Ideas or interpretations generally do not count as common knowledge. If you read in R.A.C. Parker's history of World War II that British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain did not have to agree to the 1938 Munich Pact with Hitler, and that he could have chosen an alternate path, you would need to acknowledge the source, since this judgment is Parker's theory rather than a widely agreed upon fact. (Historians disagree on the factors that led Chamberlain to agree to sign on to the Munich Pact.) Some interpretations or opinions (rather than facts) have entered the realm of common knowledge and need not be cited. If you were to introduce the claim that culture provides a means by which humans adapt to their environments, you would not need to cite a source for this claim, since it is almost universally held by anthropologists. But, if you were unsure that this was the consensus view among anthropologists, you could go ahead and cite the source. On the whole, opinions or interpretations do not enter the realm of common knowledge as easily as historical or scientific facts.

Verbatim language drawn from a source is rarely common knowledge, unless the formulation is widely known.

You should always provide a citation for quotations you use in your writing. The only—and rare—exceptions to this rule concern well-known quotations that have entered the realm of common knowledge. For example, if you were writing a paper about President Obama's Inaugural Address, you would need to cite your source for any quotations you used from the speech. However, if in the course of that paper you compared one of President Obama's lines to this very well-known phrase from John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," you would not need to provide a citation for that one phrase. However, if you were to analyze Kennedy's speech substantively and quote additional lines, then you would need to cite anything you quoted from his speech so that your readers could confirm the original language of the speech. If you are not sure whether a quotation is common knowledge, cite it.

Other Scenarios to Avoid

Misrepresenting a Source

When you use someone else's ideas in your writing, you are expected to represent those ideas clearly and accurately. If you don't understand something you've read, don't try to incorporate it into your essay. If you try to incorporate ideas that you don't understand, you run the risk of taking those ideas out of context or making the case that an author says something other than what he or she has actually said. In addition, if you don't understand a source, you are more likely to blur the distinction between the source ideas and your own, which could lead you to unintentional plagiarism. The best way to prevent this is to make sure that you understand every idea that you are using in your paper, and to talk to your instructor about areas of confusion.

Ignoring Sources Found Late in Your Research Process

If you have already written your paper and you find a source that makes the same argument you've made in your paper, don't ignore it and submit the paper anyway, assuming no one will notice. Instead, consult your TF or professor before deciding what to do. It may be that the source's argument isn't quite the same as yours, or that you can revise your argument to differentiate your ideas from those in the source. If you discover the source at the last minute and you don't have time to ask your instructor, add a footnote explaining when you found the source and how it compares to your own paper.

Turning in the Same Paper for More than One Class

Harvard has a very clear policy on using the same paper for more than one class (see Harvard Plagiarism Policy). Although a paper you write is clearly your own work, you are expected to produce new work for each course so that you can incorporate what you have learned in that course, and so that you can receive credit for doing work in that course. The only way to submit the same paper for more than one course is to obtain written consent in advance from both instructors.

Why Does it Matter if You Plagiarize?

Scholars place a premium on careful, original thought. Academic writing is essentially an ongoing conversation among scholars. As a college student, you are part of the community of scholars who are working to answer genuine questions in their fields by building on the knowledge and ideas that others have contributed. When you use sources to write a paper, you have the responsibility to represent others' ideas accurately and to contribute your own ideas to the discussion. Your professors expect you to do your own thinking, and they assign research and writing so that you can figure out what you think rather than reporting or parroting someone else's thoughts. You actually don't learn anything when you take your ideas from someone else; you learn by analyzing the ideas you have read about and developing your own responses to them.

At Harvard, the commitment to creating knowledge and contributing to a community that values learning and creation is expressed in the Honor Code, which makes explicit the value of both doing your own thinking and building on the knowledge created by others.

The Harvard College Honor Code

> *Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.*

You can read more about the [Honor Code here](#).

When you conduct research for your own paper, you rely on the citations provided by other authors to find material relevant to your topic or question. Similarly, when you write an essay, you are responsible for providing a roadmap for your readers back to your source material so that they, too, can follow the conversation. By citing your sources you provide guidance to the scholars who come after you. In this way, anyone who wants to enter the conversation, to take a position different from yours, or to build on knowledge or ideas in your paper can do so.

So, for example, if you're asked to write a literature review for a psychology paper, part of your task is to provide clear information for your readers about where you found the literature you're reviewing. Similarly, if your Expos assignment asks you to read and critique Stanley Milgram's

report of his famous obedience experiments and you come up with an argument that is informed by C.D. Herrera's (2001) claim that the deception in the experiments did not cause the subjects to suffer, then you must cite Herrera's article in your paper (Herrera, C.D. (2001) Ethics, deception, and 'those Milgram experiments.' *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 18(3), 245-256.) and explain how his argument influenced your own thinking.

The bottom line is this: Whenever you report on or summarize someone else's ideas, you owe it to that person to properly credit him for his work. You also owe your readers a roadmap through the literature you surveyed so they can see what led you to your conclusions and whether they agree with those conclusions. Careful citation also helps your readers distinguish which ideas are your own and which ideas come from your sources.

How to Avoid Plagiarism

It's not enough to know why plagiarism is taken so seriously in the academic world or to know how to recognize it. You also need to know how to avoid it.

The simplest cases of plagiarism to avoid are the intentional ones: If you copy a paper from a classmate, buy a paper from the Internet, copy material from a book, article, podcast, video, or website without citing the author, you are plagiarizing. Here's the best advice you'll ever receive about avoiding intentional plagiarism: **If you're tempted to borrow someone else's ideas or plagiarize in any way because you're pressed for time, nervous about how you're doing in a class, or confused about the assignment,** *don't do it*. The problems you think you're solving by plagiarizing are really minor compared to the problems you will create for yourself by plagiarizing. In every case, the consequences of plagiarism are much more serious than the consequences of turning in a paper late or turning in a paper you're not satisfied to have written.

The consequences of accidental plagiarism are equally daunting and should be avoided at all costs. As a member of an intellectual community you are expected to respect the ideas of others in the same way that you would respect any other property that didn't belong to you, and this is true whether you plagiarize on purpose or by accident. The best way to make sure you don't plagiarize due to confusion or carelessness is to **1) understand what you're doing when you write a paper** and **2) follow a method that is systematic and careful as you do your research**. In other words, if you have a clear sense of what question you're trying to answer and what knowledge you're building on, and if you keep careful, clear notes along the way, it's much easier to use sources effectively and responsibly and, most of all, to write a successful paper.

If you have questions about plagiarism at any point in your research or writing process, ask. It's always better to ask questions than it is to wait for an instructor to respond to work that you have turned in for a grade. Once you have turned in your final work, you will be held responsible for misuse of sources.

With these principles in mind, here are some guidelines for conducting research responsibly.

Keep Track of Your Sources; Save PDFs or Print Electronic Sources

While it's easy enough to keep a stack of books or journal articles on your desk where you can easily refer back to them, it's just as important to keep track of electronic sources. When you save a PDF of a journal article, make sure you put it into a folder on your computer where you'll be able to find it. When you consult a website, log the URL in a separate document from the paper

you're writing so that you'll be able to return to the website and cite it correctly. You should also print or save to PDF the relevant pages from any websites you use, making sure you note the complete URL and the date on which you printed the material. Because electronic sources aren't stable and websites can disappear without notice, beware of directing your readers to sources that might have disappeared. Check when the website you're using was last updated and update the URLs as you work and once again right before you submit your essay. If an electronic source disappears before you submit your work, you will need to decide whether or not to keep the source in your paper. If you have saved the source and can turn it in with your paper, you should do so. If you have not saved the source, you should consult your instructor about whether or not to use that source in your paper.

The library has several helpful resources for managing your sources, including Zotero and EndNote.

Keep Sources in Correct Context

Whenever you consult a source, you should make sure you understand the context, both of the ideas within a source and of the source itself. You should also be careful to consider the context in which a source was written. For example, a book of essays published by an organization with a political bias might not present an issue with adequate complexity for your project. You can learn more about how to understand a source's context in the Evaluating Sources section of this guide.

The question of context can be more complicated when you're working with Internet sources than with print sources because you may see one article or post as separate from an entire website and use or interpret that page without fully understanding or representing its context. For example, a definition of "communism" taken from a website with a particular political agenda might provide one interpretation of the meaning of the word—but if you neglect to mention the context for that definition, you might use it as though it's unbiased when it isn't. If your web search takes you to a URL that's part of a larger website, make sure to investigate and take notes on the context of the information you're citing.

Plan Ahead

Research can often turn out to be more time-consuming than you anticipate. Budget enough time to search for sources, to take notes, and to think about how to use the sources in your essay. Moments of carelessness are more common when you leave your essay until the last minute— and when you are tired or stressed. Honest mistakes can lead to charges of plagiarism just as

dishonesty can; be careful when taking notes and when incorporating ideas and language from sources so you always know what language and ideas are yours and what belongs to a source.

Don't Cut and Paste: File and Label Your Sources

Never cut and paste information from a source straight into your own essay, and never type verbatim sentences from a print source straight into your essay. Instead, open a separate document on your computer for each source so you can file research information carefully. When you type or cut and paste into that document, make sure to include the full citation information for the print source or the full URL and the date you copied the page(s). For online sources, make sure to cite the page from which you're taking information, which may not necessarily be the home page of the site you're using. Use logical and precise names for the files you create, and add citation information and dates. This allows you to retrieve the files easily, deters you from accidentally deleting files, and helps you keep a log of the order in which your research was conducted. It's a good idea to add a note to each file that describes how you might use the information in that file. Remember: you're entering a conversation with your sources, and accurate file names and notes can help you understand and participate in that conversation. And, of course, always remember to back up your files.

Keep Your Own Writing and Your Sources Separate

Work with either the printed copy of your source(s) or (in the case of online sources) the copy you downloaded—not the online version—as you draft your essay. This precaution not only decreases the risk of plagiarism but also enables you to annotate your sources. Those annotations are an essential step both in understanding the sources and in distinguishing your own ideas from those of the sources.

Keep Your Notes and Your Draft Separate

Be careful to keep your research notes separate from your actual draft at all stages of your writing process. This will ensure that you don't cut language from a source and paste it into your paper without proper attribution. If you work from your notes, you're more likely to keep track of the boundaries between your own ideas and those in a source.

Paraphrase Carefully in Your Notes; Acknowledge Your Sources Explicitly When Paraphrasing

When you want to paraphrase material, it's a good idea first to paste the actual quotation into your notes (not directly into your draft) and then to paraphrase it (still in your notes). Putting the information in your own words will help you make sure that you've thought about what the source is saying and that you have a good reason for using it in your paper. Remember to use some form of notation in your notes to indicate what you've paraphrased and mention the author's name within the material you paraphrase. You should also include all citation information in your notes.

When you decide to use paraphrased material in your essay, make sure that you avoid gradually rewording the paraphrased material from draft to draft until you lose sight of the fact that it's still a paraphrase. Also, avoid excessive paraphrasing in which your essay simply strings together a series of paraphrases. When the ideas taken from your sources start to blend in deceptively with your own thinking, you will have a more difficult time maintaining the boundaries between your ideas and those drawn from sources. Finally, whenever you paraphrase, make sure you indicate, at each logical progression, that the ideas are taken from an authored source.

Avoid Reading a Classmate's Paper for Inspiration

If you're in a course that requires peer review or workshops of student drafts, you are going to read your classmates' work and discuss it. This is a productive way of exchanging ideas and getting feedback on your work. If you find, in the course of this work, that you wish to use someone else's idea at some point in your paper (you should never use someone else's idea as your thesis, but there may be times when a classmate's idea would work as a counterargument or other point in your paper), you must credit that person the same way you would credit any other source.

If you find yourself reading someone else's paper because you're stuck on an assignment and don't know how to proceed, you may end up creating a problem for yourself because you might unconsciously copy that person's ideas. When you're stuck, make an appointment with your instructor or go to the Writing Center for advice on how to develop your own ideas.

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Don't Save Your Citations for Later

Never paraphrase or quote from a source without immediately adding a citation. You should add citations in your notes, in your response papers, in your drafts, and in your revisions. Without them, it's too easy to lose track of where you got a quotation or an idea and to end up inadvertently taking credit for material that's not your own.

Quote Your Sources Properly

Always use quotation marks for directly quoted material, even for short phrases and key terms.

Keep a Source Trail

As you write and revise your essay, make sure that you keep track of your sources in your notes and in each successive draft of your essay. You should begin this process early, even before you start writing your draft. Even after you've handed in your essay, keep all of your research notes and drafts. You ought to be able to reconstruct the path you took from your sources to your notes and from your notes to your drafts and revision. These careful records and clear boundaries between your writing and your sources will help you avoid plagiarism. And if you are called upon to explain your process to your instructor, you'll be able to retrace the path you took when thinking, researching, and writing, from the essay you submitted back through your drafts and to your sources.

Harvard University Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism and Collaboration

The College recognizes that the open exchange of ideas plays a vital role in the academic endeavor, as often it is only through discussion with others that one is fully able to process information or to crystallize an elusive concept. Therefore, students generally are encouraged to engage in conversations with their teachers and classmates about their courses, their research, and even their assignments. These kinds of discussions and debates in some ways represent the essence of life in an academic community. And yet, it is important for all scholars to acknowledge clearly when they have relied upon or incorporated the work of others. To ensure the proper use of sources while at the same time recognizing and preserving the importance of the academic dialogue, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences adopted the following policy, which you can also find in the Student Handbook.

It is expected that all homework assignments, projects, lab reports, papers, theses, and examinations and any other work submitted for academic credit will be the student's own. Students should always take great care to distinguish their own ideas and knowledge from information derived from sources. The term "sources" includes not only primary and secondary material published in print or online, but also information and opinions gained directly from other people. Quotations must be placed properly within quotation marks and must be cited fully. In addition, all paraphrased material must be acknowledged completely. Whenever ideas or facts are derived from a student's reading and research or from a student's own writings, the sources must be indicated (see also "Submission of the Same Work to More Than One Course" below.)

Students must also comply with the policy on collaboration established for each course, as set forth in the course syllabus or on the course website. Policies vary among the many fields and disciplines in the College and may even vary for particular assignments within a course. Unless otherwise stated on the syllabus or website, when collaboration is permitted within a course students must acknowledge any collaboration and its extent in all submitted work; however, students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading. If the syllabus or website does not include a policy on collaboration, students may assume that collaboration in the completion of assignments is permitted. Collaboration in the completion of examinations is always prohibited.

The responsibility for learning the proper forms of citation lies with the individual student. Students are expected to be familiar with the Harvard Guide to Using Sources. Students who are in any doubt about the preparation of academic work should consult their instructor and Resident Dean before the work is prepared or submitted.

Students who, for whatever reason, submit work either not their own or without clear attribution to its sources will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including requirement to withdraw from the College. Students who have been found responsible for any violation of these standards will not be permitted to submit course evaluation of the course in which the infraction occurred.

Submission of the Same Work to More Than One Course

It is the expectation of every course that all work submitted for a course or for any other academic purpose will have been done solely for that course or for that purpose. If the same or similar work is to be submitted to any other course or used for any other academic purpose within the College, the prior written permission of the instructor must be obtained. If the same or similar work is to be submitted to more than one course or used for more than one academic purpose within the College during the same term, the prior written permission of all instructors involved must be obtained. A student who submits the same or similar work to more than one course or for more than one academic purpose within the College without such prior permission is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including requirement to withdraw from the College.

Students are urged to consult their Resident Dean or the instructors involved with questions concerning this important matter (see also "Plagiarism and Collaboration" above).

Tutoring Schools and Term Paper Companies

In keeping with the principle that all material submitted to a course should be the student's own work, any undergraduate who makes use of the services of a commercial tutoring school or term paper company is liable to disciplinary action. Students who sell lecture or reading notes, papers, or translations, or who are employed by a tutoring school or term paper company, are similarly liable and may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including requirement to withdraw from the College. If a student wishes to accept compensation for private tutoring in Harvard courses, prior written permission of the Dean of the College is required.