

Plagiarism and Documentation: A Self-Instructional Lesson Information Series 01/05

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Source: James E. Ford (Ed) Teaching the Research Paper: From Theory to Practice,
From Research to Writing. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1995.

Instructions: Cover the right side of each page with a piece of paper. As you answer each question, move the piece of paper to see if your answer agrees with mine.

Plagiarism is dishonesty. It's theft. It means stealing someone else's ideas or words and pretending that they're your own.

Yet often researchers develop their best ideas by puzzling over others' theories and opinions. You simply need to acknowledge what these people have said - in a footnote or its equivalent.

Deciding when to document your source takes some practice. First, let's work on general principles. You probably know most of them already.

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| 1. Should you document your source (provide a footnote or otherwise indicate your source) when you directly quote what an author has said? | 1. Yes, of course! You're clearly using someone else's words. |
| 2. Should you document your source when you paraphrase what the author has said (that is, you put the author's ideas into your own words)? | 2. Yes. You may not be using someone else's words, but you are using his or her ideas. |
| 3. Should you document your source when you mention a commonly known fact or figure? | 3. No, it's not necessary. |
| 4. Should you document your source when you mention an unusual fact or figure? | 4. Yes. If it's unusual - if it's something, for instance, that your source discovered - then you should document that discovery |
| 5. Should you document your source when you mention the results of other people's experiments? | 5. Yes. If someone has discovered something by performing an experiment, then he or she should certainly receive credit |

Thus quotations, ideas, experiments, and not-commonly-known facts and figures require documentation.

Still you need to make difficult decisions. When for instance, is a fact or figure commonly known? You need to exercise judgement.

Let's practice that judgement right now. Decide which of the following statements require documentation.

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| 1. Columbus sighted America in 1492 | 1. No, of course not. This fact is commonly known. |
| 2. The per capita national debt has grown from \$16.06 in 1870 to more than 9,600 | 2. Yes. Specific statistics, not generally known, require documentation. (My source is the 1989 <i>World Almanac and Book of Facts</i> .) |
| 3. The population of the United States is now well over two hundred million | 3. No. This fact is generally known by the well educated. Further-more, it's just an approximation. An exact figure, however, and especially one that your source specifically calculated (for example, with statistical projection techniques), would usually require documentation. |
| 4. Wilhelm C. Roentgen, the discoverer of X rays, won the first Nobel Prize in physics. | 4. No, probably not. You may not have known this fact, but you could readily find it in a reference book, and it would be considered generally known. |
| 5. John Stuart Mill lived from 1806 to 1873. | 5. No. You may not have known this fact, but you could readily find it in a reference book, and it would be considered generally known |
| 6. John Stuart Mill probably had an IQ of 190. | 6. Yes, this fact is not generally known nor readily available. (I got it from <i>The Book of Lists</i> .) Furthermore, some researcher is responsible for calculating Mill's IQ (he lived before IQ tests were developed), and that researcher deserves credit. |
| 7. Milgram found that most people are surprisingly susceptible to the influence of scientific authority; they will follow orders even when they think they are inflicting pain. | 7. You've given some documentation in the sentence-by naming Stanley Milgram-but you should include more. You need to give him credit for his experiment. |

8. At least one critic has suggested that Lewis Carroll's Alice is symbolically a phallus, as she expands and contracts.

8. Yes. For one thing, the idea is sufficiently striking and unusual that it should be attributed to a particular critic. For another thing, the phrase "At least one critic" suggests that you have a specific critic in mind (in this case, Martin Grotjahn), and thus you should name him. In general, whenever you say, "As studies show" or "One researcher disagrees" or the like, you should document the studies and researchers.

9. The original Alice was Alice Liddell, to whom Carroll told stories as he rowed with her and her sisters and Robinson Duckworth on the Isis

9. Documentation here depends on context. You probably do not need to document the statement - especially if you're writing entirely about Carroll. You may not have known these details before you started doing research, but they are generally known to critics of Carroll.

Let me suggest, though, two situations when you might need to document this information. One would be if you were challenging the facts. The you would need to trace the information in sentence no.9 back to its original source – back to Carroll's diaries (and you would need very strong evidence to refute what he says in his diary).

Another situation when you might want to document this sentence would be in a paper treating, say, ten different authors and how they were inspired to compose their works. Then you would not assume that your reader is knowledgeable about each author and would need to document the facts about each.

10. Investigation of the original manuscript recently revealed that Carroll first ended with a sketch of Alice Liddell, but then he pasted a photograph over the sketch

10. Whose investigation revealed this discovery? You need to give Morton Cohen credit.

Now you should have some idea of when you need to document facts, figures, discoveries, ideas.

Documenting quotations is simpler – every quotation should be documented. But quotations, too, require judgement. You need to decide when to quote in the first place. Let's go over some ground rules.

Decide whether the following statements are true or false

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| <p>1. Whether you quote or paraphrase, whenever you use an individual's ideas you should document your source.</p> | <p>1. True, of course!</p> |
| <p>2. Lots of long quotations show that you have done lots of reading.</p> | <p>2. False. Lots of long quotations suggest that you're too lazy to organise your own ideas – you're relying too heavily on others'. If you include quotations, it's generally better to use short ones, just enough to support your points, not to make those points and structure your paper for you.</p> |
| <p>3. An occasional long quotation may be appropriate-when, for instance, you're going to analyze the wording or logic of the passage in detail.</p> | <p>3. True. If you're going to analyse the passage in detail, referring, for instance, to specific words in specific sentences, you may need to provide the reader with a context. You can include a long quotation to make the reader's work easier-not to make your own easier.</p> |
| <p>4. Quotations should correspond word for word with the source, omissions indicated with ellipses (...) and additions with brackets ([])</p> | <p>4. True. Be sure that you omit and add words not to misrepresent the author but only to fit his or her words into your sentences. For example, suppose you want to quote from this sentence:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"When / use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean-neither more nor less."</p> <p>You might write one of the following:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">As Humpty Dumpty says, "When / use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Humpty Dumpty claims that in his use of a word "it means just what [he] choose[s] it to mean - neither more nor less."</p> |
| <p>5. Quotations are usually self-explanatory: you don't usually need to explain them.</p> | <p>5. False. Quotations should illustrate your points, not explain them for you. You need to do the explaining yourself, and you need to provide clear contexts for the quotations</p> |
| <p>6. You may want to quote a passage when it expresses something dramatically or vividly, or when you want to lend authority to what you say.</p> | <p>6. True. If you're writing about the civil rights movement, for instance, you may well want to quote Martin Luther King's statements in support of your own. His "I</p> |

have a Dream” speech also makes vivid use of language.

7. Papers on literature often use more quotations than papers in the social or natural sciences
7. True. In part the practice of incorporating more quotations is simply customary to the discipline. But in addition, the evidence for the points you’re making in a literary paper is the words of the text.
8. Paraphrasing simply requires changing a few words – then a passage is in your own words.
8. False – absolutely not! Para-phrasing requires more than just changing a word here and there – most of the words and also the sentence structure need to be your own. A good rule of thumb: as soon as you’ve written three words in a row that are identical with three consecutive words in your source, you’re doing more than paraphrasing – you’re quoting.

Now let’s suppose that you’re writing a paper on why people choose the names that they do, sometimes for their children, sometimes for themselves. You come across the following passage, in Studs Terkel’s interview with Roberta Victor:

You never used your own name in hustling. I used a different name practically every week. If you got busted, it was more difficult for them to find out who you really were. The role one plays when hustling has nothing to do with who you are. It’s only fitting and proper you take another name.

There were certain names that were in great demand. Every second hustler had the name Kim Tracy or Stacy and a couple of others that were in vogue. These were all young women from seventeen to twenty-five, and we picked these very non-ethnic-orientated WASP names, rich names.

Let’s suppose you’ve decided to paraphrase parts of this passage.

Which of the following is an acceptable paraphrase?

1. Many prostitutes used the name Kim or Tracy or Stacy or others that were in vogue.
1. Unacceptable. Notice how close the wording is to that of the source: “the name Kim or Tracy or Stacy” and “others that were in vogue.” The writer has not put the ideas into her own words. One technique is to turn the book over on your desk and then, without looking at the original wording, to write your own version.
2. Many prostitutes adopted upper-class names such as Stacy.
2. Acceptable. The statement uses ideas from the interview with Roberta Victor and mentions one of her examples, but the wording is different.

Sentence no. 2 is an acceptable paraphrase - but now let me ask another question. Does it need to be documented?

Of course it does. The ideas are clearly not your own. You need to acknowledge Studs Terkel's investigative research. You're also using one of the examples ("Stacy") that Roberta Victor mentions.

Thus, if you paraphrase Terkel and Victor's information, you need to give them credit. As with quoting, paraphrasing requires acknowledgment.

Suppose that you decide to quote from the passage to lend authority to your statement (Roberta Victor is probably more of an authority on hustling than you are) and to catch the flavor of her speech.

Which of the following phrases might you want to use?

A "all young women from seventeen to twenty-five"

B "very non-ethnic-oriented WASP names, rich names"

C "certain names were in great demand"

I would choose B. The other phrases give less of the flavor of her speech. B also makes a good supporting example. Quotations should usually support rather than replace your own statements - and thus C would not be a good choice, for it is a general statement, something that you should state in your own words.