

To Cite, or Not to Cite

A lot of students struggle with this one aspect of research papers. When do I need to cite my source? Here are some helpful tips to consider when you are unsure of whether or not to cite a source.

Not to Cite

1. **Common knowledge-** If the information you are presenting is common knowledge, you do not need to cite that source. For example, if you wanted to say “The United States is composed of 50 states” you do not need to find a scholar that says this. If it can be found in almost every source you find, it is probably safe to say it is common knowledge.
2. **Personal ideas-** Personal reflections and new ideas that come from your brain do not need to be cited. You do not have to give someone credit for something you came up with.

Cite

1. **Direct quotes-** Every time you write word for word exactly what the source said within your paper, you must give credit to the author. Depending on the citation style you are using, you may need to create a block quotation. Visit us in the Writing Center for help with that.
2. **Summarization-** Although you are using your own words to convey a larger passage of a work, it is NOT your idea. You must still give credit when credit is due.
3. **Paraphrasing-** Unlike summaries, sometimes it is necessary to put an idea in your own words keeping not only the original meaning, but also the same basic organization and level of detail as the source. Again, this is not your personal idea. You must give credit to the author.

WHEN IN DOUBT, CITE!

Plagiarism

Please make sure you cite your source when using information that is not yours. If you do not give credit to the author, you are plagiarizing. This is a serious offense and can lead to major consequences not only from your professors, but from institutions as well. For more information and statistics on plagiarism, go to <http://www.plagiarism.org/>.

Questions?

If you need help with citations or formats such as MLA, APA, and Chicago formats, please come visit us at the Writing Center in room 20 of the English Annex.