

## Avoiding Plagiarism--FAQs

SUU Writing Center

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### **What is plagiarism?**

Plagiarism is **stealing** academic or intellectual material. When a writer fails to give credit to any secondary source (a source other than the writer), he/she is plagiarizing. Plagiarism is an academic crime that can result in failing grades and even in expulsion from a university. This sheet is designed to help you differentiate between effective and acceptable use of sources and acts of plagiarism.

### **Why use secondary sources?**

Secondary sources of information give **credibility to your argument**. They help you to demonstrate competence in your reasoning by providing specific examples of “proof” for the point being presented.

### **What types of information need to be documented?**

Any original material that comes from a book, article, website, database, song, TV program, movie, chart, survey, personal interview, essay, or e-mail **needs to be documented**. While this list is incomplete, it does show the vast array of sources that must be documented. As a rule, give credit to **anything that is not your own idea or writing**.

### **What types of information do not need documentation?**

Anything that is considered **common knowledge** does not need documentation. To determine what common knowledge is, you should consider your audience by asking, “Can this information be found undocumented in several sources?” and/or “Can these sources be found easily by any reader?” According to the Purdue University Writing Center, common knowledge includes “folklore, common sense observations, shared information within [a] field of study,” and “generally accepted facts” ([http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r\\_plagiar.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html)).

### **What is the difference between quoting directly and paraphrasing?**

Quoting directly is a powerful strategy of citing source material when the original words create a strong impact. Be careful not to make more than about **20 percent** of a paper into direct quotations, for excessive quoting (especially from a single source) makes writing stagnant and **less credible**. However, carefully selected direct quotes can add depth and strength to most arguments. In lieu of quotes, many authors choose to paraphrase. However, many novice writers plagiarize without realizing they are doing so because they do not paraphrase completely enough and/or they do not document their paraphrases properly. **Paraphrases should not use the same words and sentence structure as the original quotation**. They should give the original author credit for his/her ideas with “according to” lines introducing the borrowed material and with formal parenthetical citations at the end of sentences drawn from sources. (See the sheet on MLA style for more help on parenthetical citations.)

### **Where can you go for help?**

The tutors here in the Writing Center are trained to help you with specific questions regarding plagiarism. A good general rule of thumb is this: “When in doubt, cite.”