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Avoiding Plagiarism—FAQs

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is claiming another person's work as your own by failing to cite it correctly. Different cultures have different rules about what constitutes plagiarism. In some cultures, it is not considered necessary or appropriate to document the sources of all quotes in a paper. However, in the United States, failing to document a source you use in your paper is considered plagiarism. Deliberate plagiarism can result in failing grades or expulsion from the university.

What types of information need to be documented?

Information that needs to be documented includes original material such as words, images and ideas that come from a book, article, website, database, song, TV program, movie, chart, survey, personal interview, essay, email, or any other source you use. However, most common knowledge does **not** need to be cited. For example, you do not need to cite a source that says that Independence Day is on July 4th because most people know that.

What is the difference between quoting directly and paraphrasing?

Quoting directly from a source means using the exact words that the source used. Use quotes when the original words create a strong impact. Quotes in moderation support your argument, but using too many obscures your own voice in the paper. When the original words are not important, use a paraphrase. Paraphrasing means putting a quotation into your own words. A paraphrase should not use the same words and sentence structure as the original quotation. Both quotes and paraphrases need to be documented by parenthetical citations immediately following them. The first time you quote or paraphrase a source, introduce the author in a phrase such as, "According to Smith..." before the quote.