HOW NOT TO PLAGIARIZE

From the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters:
It shall be an offence for a student knowingly:
(d) to represent as one's own any idea or expression of an idea or work of another in any academic
examination or term test or in connection with any other form of academic work, i.e. to commit plagiarism.
Wherever in the Code an offence is described as depending on “knowing”, the offence shall likewise be deemed to
have been committed if the person ought reasonably to have known.

You've already heard the warnings about plagiarism. Obviously it's against the rules to buy essays or copy from
your friends’ homework, and it's also plagiarism to borrow passages from books or articles or websites without
identifying them. You know that the purpose of any paper is to show your own thinking, not create a patchwork of
borrowed ideas. But you may still be wondering how you're supposed to give proper references to all the reading
you've done and all the ideas you've encountered.

The point of documenting sources in academic papers is not just to avoid unpleasant visits to the Dean's office, but
to demonstrate that you know what is going on in your field of study. Get credit for having done your reading!
Precise documentation is also a courtesy to your readers because it lets them look at the material you've found.
That's especially important for Internet sources.

The different systems for formatting references are admittedly a nuisance. See the advice file “Standard
Documentation Formats” for an overview. But the real challenge is establishing the relationship of your thinking
to the reading you've done. Here are some common questions and basic answers.

1. Can't I avoid problems just by listing every source in the reference list?
No, you need to integrate your acknowledgements into your own writing. Give the reference as soon as you’ve
mentioned the idea you’re using, not just at the end of the paragraph. It’s often a good idea to name the authors (“X
states” and “Y argues against X”) and then indicate your own stand (“A more inclusive perspective, however, . . . ”).
The examples on the next page demonstrate various wordings for doing this. Have a look at journal articles in your
discipline to see how experts refer to their sources.

2. If I put the ideas into my own words, do I still have to clog up my pages with all those
names and numbers?
Sorry—yes, you do. In academic papers, you need to keep mentioning authors and pages and dates to show how
your ideas are related to those of the experts. It’s sensible to use your own words because that saves space and lets
you connect ideas smoothly. But whether you quote a passage directly in quotation marks, paraphrase it closely, or
just summarize it rapidly, you need to identify the source then and there. (That applies to Internet sources too: you
still need author and date as well as title and URL. The file “Standard Documentation Formats” gives examples
for a range of types.)

3. But I didn't know anything about the subject until I started this paper. Do I have to give an
acknowledgement for every point I make?
You’re safer to over-reference than to skimp. But you can cut down the clutter by recognizing that some ideas are
“common knowledge” in the field—that is, taken for granted by people knowledgeable about the topic. Facts easily
found in standard reference books are considered common knowledge: the date of the Armistice for World War I,
for example, or the present population of Canada. You don't need to name a specific source for them, even if you
learned them only when doing your research. They’re easily verified and not likely to be controversial. In some
disciplines, information covered in class lectures doesn’t need acknowledgement. Some interpretive ideas may also be
so well accepted that you don’t need to name a specific source: that Picasso is a distinguished modernist painter, for
instance, or that smoking is harmful to health. Check with your professor or TA if you're in doubt whether a specific
point is considered common knowledge in your field.

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