

Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is using the ideas and/or words of others in your writing without clearly acknowledging the source. Some actions are blatant examples of plagiarism, such as buying, stealing, or borrowing a paper; copying and pasting material from the internet and presenting it as your own; or hiring someone to write a paper for you. However, students may unknowingly plagiarize simply by being careless or by not understanding what is required for appropriate use of information from other sources. Unfortunately, ignorance is no defense, and colleges have severe penalties for confirmed cases of plagiarism, made even easier to identify by programs such as *turnitin.com*.

What DOES NOT need documentation?

- Your own **observations, opinions, thoughts or conclusions** about a subject.
- Your own **results** obtained through lab or field experiments or surveys.
- Your own **artwork, photographs, video or audio**.
- **Common knowledge**, which generally refers to facts that can be found in numerous places and are very likely to be known by your audience.
- **Well known tales or folklore**. You can refer to Cinderella and her lost slipper without citing it to a particular version of the story (unless you are writing about or comparing specific versions).
- **Common sense observations**. "Spilled water on the floor is likely to make someone slip and fall."
- **Generally accepted interpretations of facts**. "Pollution is bad for the environment."

What DOES need documentation?

- **ANY** information from an **outside source**, unless it is considered common knowledge for your audience.
- **Facts, statistics, graphs, drawings, photographs, works of art**.
- **Ideas, opinions or interpretations of anyone other than you**. Note that these types of information are best accompanied by the name the source within your sentence, in addition to the proper parenthetical citation format.
- **Exact quotations from a source**. You *must* use quotation marks around the quoted material; just citing the source is not enough to avoid plagiarism.
- **Summaries or paraphrases of material from a source**. Some students *mistakenly* believe they must only cite direct quotations. Carefully check any summaries or paraphrases against the original to make sure you have conveyed the information accurately in *your own* words.