A Brief Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the practice of intentionally or unintentionally using someone else’s intellectual property without properly acknowledging the original source (Palmquist 173).

To avoid plagiarism and its severe consequences, it is important to take the time to learn proper attribution. Some forms of plagiarism, like multiple submissions, for example, may not be as obvious as the well-known copy and paste form. Moreover, you may unwittingly follow the “three word rule” myth.

Documenting your work far extends academic conventions and etiquette—it establishes your credibility as a trustworthy writer, researcher, and professional. A properly documented text demonstrates the breadth and context of your research. Moreover, proper attribution helps readers easily research and interrogate potential misrepresentations.

This guide is by no means comprehensive; however, it serves a springboard to learn essential rules for proper attribution, review various forms of plagiarism, and gain an overview about style guides.
I. Overview

University of Texas at Austin

The University of Texas at Austin expects students to “maintain a high standard of individual honor in scholastic work” (134). For official policies regarding scholastic dishonesty, please refer to The Catalog of the University of Texas at Austin, “Appendix C, Chapter 11: Student Discipline and Conduct” located at <http://registrar.utexas.edu/docs/catalogs/gi/ut-catalog-gi-11-12.pdf>.

Student Judicial Services also discusses the University’s standards of academic integrity at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php>.

Consequences of Plagiarism

Not giving credit where credit is due will damage your reputation as a trustworthy researcher. Furthermore, you could face penalties that may negatively influence your academic and professional opportunities. In public service, for example, University of Texas at Austin professor Dr. Robert Auerbach warns an academic disciplinary record may prevent you “from obtaining a security clearance.”

According to Andrea Lunsford, Director of the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at Stanford University, even “instructors who plagiarize, even inadvertently, have had their degrees revoked, their books withdrawn from publication” (396). Lunsford continues, “and outside academic life, eminent political, business, and scientific leaders have been stripped of candidacies, positions, and awards because of plagiarism” (396). Type the term plagiarism in a Google news search, and hundreds of results feature current cases about resignations, stripped doctorate degrees, and ruined careers.

At the University of Texas at Austin, students may face severe sanctions. Please refer to “Consequences of Scholastic Dishonesty Can Be Severe!” at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis_conseq.php> for current university sanctions.

Rules for Proper Attribution

With so many consequences, plagiarism can be intimidating; however, the following basic rules can help you avoid plagiarism:

- Acknowledge the source of any full or partial quotation
- Acknowledge the source of any paraphrase, summary or idea
- Acknowledge the source of any type of intellectual property you use
- Acknowledge the source of “an organization or structure” (Lunsford 396)
- Do not “submit a substantially similar paper or project for credit in two (or more) courses unless expressly authorized to do so by your instructor(s)” (SJS, Multiple par. 2)
- Acknowledge borrowed material even in “a draft that is being submitted to an instructor for review, comments, and/or approval” (SJS, Plagiarism par. 2)
- Acknowledge collaboration—collaboration is unauthorized unless your instructor specifically approves collaboration (SJS, Unauthorized)
- Cite sources correctly according to your instructor’s preferred style manual
- Consult either your instructor or the writing center when in doubt about how to acknowledge a source. Your instructors are always glad to offer assistance.

II. Forms of Plagiarism

Plagiarism involves more than intentionally sampling a term paper from a friend or purchasing a text from a paper mill and presenting the text as your own research. Plagiarism also involves submitting the same assignment in two or more classes; and using another author’s ideas and argumentative forms, direct quotations, phrases and unique terminology without proper attribution. Moreover, plagiarism involves paraphrasing and summarizing without using proper attribution.

The following examples illustrate how to avoid plagiarism using proper documentation from both the MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing, 3rd edition and the sixteenth edition of the Chicago Manual of Style (notes and bibliography system). Each entry is accompanied by a bibliography entry.
Multiple Submissions
If students face a time crunch, what is the problem if they submit the same term paper they wrote for two different classes if the required topic is similar in both classes? The Catalog of the University of Texas at Austin states, “submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor” constitutes academic dishonesty (205).

Student Judicial Services explains multiple submissions are problematic because they are “inherently deceptive” and give writers an “unfair academic advantage” over other students (Multiple par. 6; 8). Writers who submit the same assignment multiple times also face an academic disadvantage by not seizing the opportunity to apply new concepts and improve their writing skills. Writing assignments and audience expectations vary, so it is useful to complete an assignment that meets the new requirements of your particular rhetorical context. Many instances, however, do exist when class topics overlap or complement each other. With instructor approval, you may either “re-work or supplement previous work on a topic” for a new text (SJS, Multiple par. 3).

Never assume that you may use or supplement previous work for any of your courses or capstone projects such as the thesis or professional report (PR); instead, you must always obtain the approval of your instructor(s). Although tempting, especially during time crunches, avoid multiple submissions—instead, take the time to manage your writing projects and specifically address your unique writing contexts. If you need assistance managing your writing projects, consult your instructors.

For more information regarding multiple submissions, please refer to the SJS Multiple Submissions discussion located at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis_multsub.php>.

Improper Use of Ideas and Summaries
If you use someone else’s ideas or “line of thinking,” without proper attribution, then you have plagiarized (Gibaldi MLA Style 151). Some students, for example, inadvertently plagiarize their professor’s ideas from lectures and use the borrowed information in papers for other classes.

You can avoid instances of unintentional plagiarism by acknowledging the lecture and distinguishing your professor’s ideas from your own by using proper attribution. The following examples, for instance, demonstrate how to cite a lecture and an idea derived from a book.

Example: Original Text
Using the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th ed., a writer can easily document an idea from a professor’s lecture:

According to LBJ School of Public Affairs lecturer Evan Smith, well-written op-eds typically convey “unconventional wisdom.”

Evan Smith, “Op-Eds, Persuasion and Public Policy” (lecture, University of Texas, Austin, TX, October 28, 2005).

Bibliography

A summary is a condensation of a source’s main ideas using your own words and sentence structure. Always indicate the source of your summary by referencing the author, specifying a page number, and including full bibliographic information. Consider treatment of the following excerpt:

Example: Original Text
“My argument broadly speaking, is that the category of the aesthetic assumes the importance it does in modern Europe because in speaking of art it speaks of these other matters too, which are at the heart of the middle class’s struggle for political hegemony. The construction of the modern notion of the aesthetic artifact is thus inseparable from the construction of dominant ideological forms of modern class-society, and indeed from a whole new form of human subjectivity appropriate to that social order. In is on this account, rather that because men and women have suddenly awoken to the supreme value of painting or poetry, that aesthetics plays so obtrusive a role in the intellectual heritage of the present. But my argument is also that the aesthetic, understood in a certain sense, provides an unusually powerful challenge and alternative to these dominant ideological forms, and is in this sense an eminently contradictory phenomenon.” — Terry Eagleton, The Ideology of the Aesthetic, p. 9
Aesthetics is a double-edged sword. It circulates dominant political ideologies, yet simultaneously challenges and actively criticizes them.

**Revision: Chicago**

Terry Eagleton explains that aesthetics is a double-edged sword—it circulates dominant political ideologies, yet simultaneously challenges and actively criticizes them.²


**Bibliography**


The revision includes a superscript number at the end of the sentence indicating a borrowed idea. The superscript number corresponds to a note, which indicates complete publication information and the exact location of the borrowed idea. Even though the note provides complete publication information, the revision also provides a bibliographic entry. The format of a Chicago-style bibliographic entry differs slightly from the note format even though both provide essentially the same publication information.

Unlike a note, however, the bibliography provides the author’s last name first (last name, first name); uses periods to separate elements; does not provide parenthesis around the location, publisher, and year; has a non-indented first line, yet indented subsequent lines; and is arranged alphabetically.

Even though the *Chicago Manual of Style* prefers including a bibliography, the manual indicates, “not all annotated works require a bibliography, since full details can be given in the notes” (612). As such, be sure to ask your instructors about whether or not they require a bibliography for class assignments—professors will typically require a bibliography for texts over four pages. Accordingly, most professors will find a bibliography unnecessary for a two page memo; notes are nonetheless still a requirement. As a word of caution, a bibliography is always required for PR and thesis writers.

**Revision: MLA**

In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Eagleton asserts that contemporary aesthetics is a double-edged sword because it circulates dominant political ideologies, yet simultaneously challenges and actively criticizes them (9).

**Bibliography**


In this revised example, by including the title and the author’s name, the writer refers the reader to the full description of the text in the bibliography. The parenthetical citation identifies the specific page number in which the reader may locate Eagleton’s claim.


**Direct Quotations, Phrases, & Unique Terminology**

If you use direct quotations, phrases, or unique terminology from a source without proper attribution, then you have plagiarized. Surround the original text “you are quoting with quotation marks and identify the source and the page numbers (if any) on which the quotation can be found” and provide a bibliographic entry (Palmquist 167). Even if the text is factual, you must still use quotation marks.

When using the block quotation format, you do not need to use quotation marks; however, you must set the quotation off from the rest of the text and always include source attribution using an appropriate style. When using MLA documentation, for example, use a block quotation for text running longer than four lines (MLA 124). According to the 16th edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, however, “a hundred words or more (at least six to eight lines of text in a typical manuscript) can generally be set off as a block quotation” (623).
Consider the following quotation, for example, from Machiavelli's text *The Prince* in MLA format. Machiavelli argues that people see what a prince *appears* to be rather than what he *is*:

Generally, men judge by the eye rather than the hand, for all men can see a thing, but few come close enough to touch it. All men will see what you seem to be; only a few will know what you are, and those few will not dare to oppose the many who have the majesty of the state on their side to defend them. (63–4).

To properly integrate quotations in your text, be sure to introduce the source and author using signal phrases (also known as introductory phrases) and signal verbs, which reflect the perspective the author is expressing. Examples of signal phrases include: according to Machiavelli, when Machiavelli says, in the words of Machiavelli, Machiavelli suggests, Machiavelli warns, and so forth.

**Example: Original Text**

“Turning to some other of the aforementioned qualities, I say that every prince ought to be considered kind rather than cruel.” — Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p.59

**Plagiarized Example**

According to Machiavelli, a prince should aim to be considered kind rather than cruel.

**Explanation:** Even though this example provides an introductory phrase (According to Machiavelli), it lacks attribution. Furthermore, the example omits quotation marks surrounding the exact language (*to be considered kind rather than cruel*) borrowed from the original text.

**Revision: Chicago**

According to Machiavelli, a prince should aim “to be considered kind rather than cruel.”


**Bibliography**


In this revision, the author’s name and superscript number refer to a footnote, which identifies the specific page number of the borrowed text. The footnote also corresponds to a bibliographic entry. In addition, the revised example has quotation marks surrounding the borrowed language from the original text.

**Revisions: MLA**

Machiavelli advises a prince should aim “to be considered kind rather than cruel” (*Prince* 59).

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli advises a prince should aim “to be considered kind rather than cruel” (59).

**Bibliography**


The above revisions do not only introduce the source and provide an appropriate signal verb (advises), but also provide quotation marks surrounding the exact language of the original source. The parenthetical citation identifies the specific page number of the quoted material, which corresponds to complete publication information in the bibliography.

**Improper Use of Indirect Sources**

If you want to use a quotation from a work that quotes another source, then you must cite both sources in your text and bibliography or works cited list. Simply attributing the original quotation to the secondary source is dishonest. Moreover, do not trust that the author correctly quoted the original text.

Style manuals differ in terms of how to cite secondary sources. The *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. explains,

“To cite a source from a secondary source (‘quoted in…’) is generally to be discouraged, since authors are expected to have examined the works they cite. If an original source is unavailable, however, both the original and the secondary source must be listed.


The third edition of the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* states,

> Whenever you can, take material from the original source, not a secondhand one. [...] If what you quote or paraphrase is itself a quotation, put the abbreviation *qtd.* in (“quoted in”) before the indirect source you cite in your parenthetical reference. (You may document the original source in a note; see 7.5.1.). (253)

**Improper Paraphrasing**

When writers paraphrase, they rephrase detailed information from a source using their own words and sentence structure. As such, paraphrases lack quotation marks; however, you must still include the author’s name and page number, and provide publication information in your bibliography. Even though paraphrases are your restatements using your own words, paraphrases still derive from original sources, so you must always properly attribute.

Writers may treat paraphrases similar to quotations by including signal phrases. If in your paraphrase, you need to keep an author’s phrase or specific terminology, then surround the quoted material with quotation marks and cite accordingly.

**Example: Original Text**


**Plagiarized Example**

If you transcribe a quotation with careless variants, then you are not accurately representing your source. As such, graduate students typically photocopy their sources and double-check the accuracy of their quotations.

**Explanation:** The above example is plagiarized because it omits a signal phrase indicating the source of the borrowed material and lacks a citation in the text and bibliography. The example also uses exact wording and follows the same sentence structure of the original text. Furthermore, the example includes a new idea not present in the original source thus making it impossible for the reader to distinguish idea ownership.

**Revision: Chicago**

Scott and Garrison point out that you can misrepresent and original source with sloppy note taking. As such, graduate students usually double-check the accuracy of their quotations.


**Bibliography**


**Explanation:** The revised sentence not only differs in sentence structure, but provides a signal phrase, unique language and a note. Moreover, the example clearly distinguishes the paraphrase from the writer’s assessment of why students double-check the accuracy of their notes.

**Revision: MLA**

According to Scott and Garrison, you can inaccurately represent an original source with sloppy note taking (147). As such, graduate students usually double-check the accuracy of their quotations.

**Bibliography**


**Explanation:** The revised sentence not only differs in sentence structure, but also provides a signal phrase and identifies a specific page number. The example offers unique language and provides the complete citation in the works cited. Moreover, the paraphrase explains why students double-check the accuracy of their quotations.

**Common Knowledge**

Student Judicial Services explains that it may be difficult to differentiate “‘borrowed ideas (which must be cited)” and ‘common knowledge’ (which generally requires no citation)” ([SJS, *Common par. 1*]). For general guidelines regarding how to differentiate the two, visit “Common Knowledge: Whose Idea Is It, Anyway?” at [http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis_avoid_ack_en.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis_avoid_ack_en.php) or consult your instructor(s).
When you are uncertain about whether or not the information you want to borrow is common knowledge, then simply cite your source or seek assistance from your instructor. SJ’s also advises, “as you encounter particular facts or ideas, pay close attention to and note the sources” (SJ’s, Common par. 2).

Remember, if you borrow direct quotations, phrases, or unique terminology from a source without proper attribution, then you have plagiarized. You must surround the original text “you are quoting with quotation marks and identify the source and the page numbers (if any) on which the quotation can be found” and provide a bibliographic entry (Palmquist 167). Even if the borrowed text is factual and available in many sources, you must still use quotation marks.

### III. Checklists

Andrea Lunsford developed the following list to help writers determine whether or not they have to acknowledge sources (396). Although the list is not definitive, it allows you to see the range of possibilities:

#### Need to Acknowledge
- Summaries or paraphrases of a source ideas you glean from a source
- Facts that aren’t widely known
- Graphs, tables, and other statistical information taken or derived from a source
- Photographs
- Illustrations or other visuals you do not create
- Experiments conducted by others
- Opinions and judgments of others
- Interviews that are not part of a survey
- Video or sound taken from sources
- Organization or structure taken from a source

#### Don’t Need to Acknowledge
- Your own words observations, surveys and so on
- common knowledge
- Facts available in many sources
- Graphs or tables you create from statistics you compile on your own
- Drawings you create (Lunsford 396).

The following (non-comprehensive) checklist highlights some ways to avoid intentional and unintentional plagiarism:

#### Quoting
- Use quotation marks around full and partial quotations
- Use quotation marks around borrowed terminology and unique phrases
- Use verbs that express the author’s viewpoint
- Use signal phrases (author tags) in addition to proper documentation
- Acknowledge your sources by including notes or in-text parenthetical citations and a bibliography
- Use an appropriate block quotation format:
  - MLA style: for quotations running longer than 4 lines (MLA 124)
  - Chicago-style: for “a hundred words or more—or at least eight lines” (623)
- Always cite your secondary sources

#### Paraphrasing
- Write paraphrases entirely in your own words and sentence structure
- Use signal phrases
- Use introductory verbs that characterize the author’s viewpoint
- Cite the original source in the text of your document and bibliography using an appropriate style
- Use quotation marks around any words you retain from the original source
- Clearly differentiate your ideas/explanations from the original source
- Double-check the original source to make sure the paraphrase is accurate

#### Collaboration
- Collaborate on assignments only with instructor authorization
- Know your instructor’s parameters for collaborative projects
- List the coauthors on a collaboratively written project. Gibaldi explains you may “state exactly who did what” or “acknowledge all concerned equally” (MLA Handbook 74)
- Acknowledge significant ideas/contributions from a conversation with instructors, classmates, and other reviewers (Lunsford 395)

#### Electronic Resources
- Attribute any information taken from electronic sources
For unpaginated works, “it may be appropriate in a note to include a chapter or paragraph number (if available), a section heading or a descriptive phrase that follows the organizational divisions of the work. In citations of shorter electronic works presented as a single, searchable document, such locators may be unnecessary” (Chicago 662).

Ask your instructor whenever in doubt about how to cite an electronic source—not finding a specific rule in a style guide does not give you the excuse to simply omit attribution.

Avoid copying and pasting passages from the Internet directly into your document without proper attribution.

### IV. Documentation

Documenting your work establishes your credibility as a responsible writer and researcher. Proper documentation not only demonstrates to your readers that you have attempted to research your issue, but provides readers with a sense of context. Similar to motorists using turn signals in traffic and stopping at intersections, using proper documentation likewise consists of a shared set of consistent rules for communication. Style guides will differ depending upon the shared expectations and emphases of each field. Some guides, for example, highlight the date rather than the author to emphasize the timeliness of the information.

### Style Manuals

Writers adopt a specific style guide depending on the demands of their field. Most style guides will not only provide documentation rules, but also grammar and usage rules. The following list highlights a few style manuals you may most likely use among your classes:

**American Psychological Association (APA):** used in psychology, sociology, and other behavioral social sciences


**The Chicago Manual of Style (CMS):** used in many fields including the social sciences and humanities


**Modern Language Association (MLA):** used typically in the humanities


### Intentional & Unintentional Plagiarism

- Avoid submitting previously written work
- Avoid turning in work from online resources that sell term papers
- Double-check the accuracy of your notes and bibliographic information
- Use proper attribution in all drafts that you submit to an instructor for “review, comments, and/or approval” (SJS, *Plagiarism* par. 4)
The Chicago Manual of Style

Some professors may require you to use the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th ed. and use the notes and bibliography system. The notes and bibliography system does not use in-text parenthetical citations, but requires writers to place a superscript number directly after any information requiring attribution. This superscript number corresponds to either a footnote or an endnote, which provides a specific page number. Footnotes are located at the bottom of the page whereas endnotes are located at the end of your text. Notes are “preferably” supplemented by a bibliography (Chicago 660). A bibliography is arranged alphabetically and located after endnotes or the last page of a text.

The following examples illustrate basic Chicago-style citations for a book. Note the treatment of Eagleton’s text:

Footnote or Endnote

Subsequent reference to the same source on the same page. Ibid. is the abbreviation of ibidem, meaning “in the same place”
2 Ibid.

Subsequent reference to the same source but on a different page
3 Ibid., 259.
4 Ibid., 250.

Subsequent referent to the same source, but with intervening references
6 Eagleton, Ideology, 237.
8 Eagleton, Ideology, 238.
10 For further discussion of this problem, see Pollan, Omnivore’s Dilemma, 55.

Bibliographic reference of the same source

Electronic Sources

For Chicago, the format of an e-source is identical to print counterparts, but with the recommended addition of a URL or digital object identifier (DOI) and access dates. Although Chicago does not require access dates for citations, check with your professors about their preferences; they typically require access dates for time-sensitive material.

Chicago recommends that “authors should include DOIs rather than URLs for sources that make them readily available” (CMS 657). URLs can be unstable; however, a DOI “is a unique and permanent name assigned to a piece of intellectual property […] in any medium in which it is published” (CMS 657). DOIs are located in the publication details of databases and indexes to articles. Consult your professors about their preferences regarding URL versus DOI use. The below examples demonstrate the location of DOIs or URLs in both electronic journals with and without pagination.

Electronic Journals: Pagination


Electronic Journals: No Pagination

The fifteenth edition of the Chicago Manual advises, for electronic sources that do not provide page numbers, “add a descriptive locator” […] to citation in text or in the notes if doing so will be helpful to readers” (696).

Electronic Journals: No Pagination
Works Cited


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CMS, 16th ed.