

## **An ELL Guide to Understanding Plagiarism: Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Citing**

Many English language learners (ELL) find it challenging to understand the concept of plagiarism. This handout defines and explains plagiarism, quoting, paraphrasing, and citing.

### **Key Vocabulary**

- **Plagiarism:** Using another person's work as one's own without giving the author credit
- **Quoting:** Using the exact words that the writer used
- **Paraphrasing:** Writing the author's ideas using one's own words, without changing the original meaning
- **Citing:** Providing a reference of the source, which includes the name of the original author, the date the work was created, and where the information was found. The reference is the citation.

### **Understanding Plagiarism**

Not all cultures view the sharing of information in the same way. American culture values the rights of individuals who produce original work. If a student ignores the rights of the original author and presents the author's words as the student's original work, it is considered to be plagiarism. Plagiarizing another person's original work, which includes the work of a generative AI app such as ChatGPT, can lead to serious academic consequences even if it was unintentional. A student may not receive credit for an assignment, and in the case of repeat offenses, a student may fail the course or even be suspended from the college.

For more information on this topic, please refer to the Academic Center for Excellence's interactive module [Understanding Plagiarism](#).

### **Quoting and Paraphrasing**

Students can present the information they learned through research in two different forms:

- **Quoting the Author**  
This refers to writing the author's exact written words, whether those words already have quotation marks around them or not. When quoting the author, the student will place quotation marks around the words that they have taken directly from the text.

- Paraphrasing the Author

For some assignments, it will be better to paraphrase rather than use direct quotations. Paraphrasing refers to expressing the ideas of the author's words in one's own words. A good paraphrase does not simply substitute words with their synonyms. A good paraphrase includes a different sentence structure from the original passage, and it uses different words to express the same ideas. Try this exercise to learn how to paraphrase:

1. Read the passage carefully to ensure it is fully understood.
2. Cover the passage (close the book, the computer, or the phone).
3. Speak aloud what you have understood from the passage.
4. Write down what you said aloud.
5. Go back and correct any non-academic language such as contractions or slang vocabulary.

Quotation marks are not used around paraphrased information. However, paraphrases still need to be cited. The student has used their own words, but they are based on the author's ideas or information.

**Example:** Original Work from "Poor Richard's Almanack" by Benjamin Franklin

Who has deceived thee so oft as thyself?

**Example:** Paraphrase of Original Work

We lie to ourselves more often than others lie to us (Franklin, 1758).

This paraphrase includes all the significant information without changing the meaning, but it uses different sentence structure and vocabulary. It also includes an in-text citation at the end.

For more information on this topic, please refer to the Academic Center for Excellence's interactive module [How to Paraphrase Effectively](#).

### **When Citing Sources Is Necessary**

It is important to recognize when it is appropriate to use a citation. Everything that a student learned through research must have a citation. Whether a student quotes someone else's words or paraphrases them, the information still belongs to the original author because the student learned it from that source. Therefore, they must cite, or explain, the origin of the source of the information they found during research using a citation. (See **Key Vocabulary** for

more information.) This process applies to written work, images, charts, videos, and music. A citation will appear in two forms:

- **In-Text Citations**  
These refer to short notes in the body of the text, appearing in parentheses immediately after the quoted or paraphrased text.
- **Reference Citations**  
These refer to full details about sources, appearing on the References page (APA style) or Works Cited page (MLA style) at the end of the paper.

Students should always check the assignment instructions to see which citation style should be used. This could be [MLA](#), [APA](#), or [Chicago Manual of Style](#) format. Germanna's [ACE](#) web page provides all the citation style guides for more support.

### **When Citing Sources Is NOT Necessary**

No citation is necessary when the student expresses a personal opinion or argument, presents their own originally created images, or includes information already known through personal experiences or observations. In addition, no citation is necessary if the information found in research is considered common knowledge. Common knowledge refers to:

- Information that most people already know  
**Example:** George Washington was the first president of the United States.
- Information that is undisputed, such as proven facts  
**Example:** Water boils at 100 degrees Celsius and 212 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Information that may not be well known but can be easily found in a number of sources  
**Example:** The state bird of Virginia is the cardinal.

### **Additional Resources**

[Understanding Plagiarism](#) interactive module

[How to Paraphrase Effectively](#) interactive module

[MLA Format Guide, 9th Edition](#) handout

[APA Format](#) handout

[Chicago Manual of Style Citation Guide](#) handout

[Generative AI Citation Guide](#) handout