**How to avoid plagiarism**

[Plagiarism](https://www.scribbr.co.uk/category/academic-dishonesty/) means using someone else’s words or ideas without properly crediting the original author. Sometimes plagiarism involves deliberately stealing someone’s work, but often it happens accidentally, through carelessness or forgetfulness.

When you write an academic paper, you build upon the work of others and use various sources for information and evidence. To avoid plagiarism, you need to correctly incorporate these sources into your text.

Follow these four steps to ensure your paper is free from plagiarism:

1. Keep track of the **sources** you consult in your research.
2. **Paraphrase or quote** from your sources (and add your own ideas).
3. Credit the original author in an in-text**citation** and reference list.
4. Use a **plagiarism checker** before you submit.

Plagiarism can have [serious consequences](https://www.scribbr.co.uk/academic-dishonesty/consequences-of-plagiarism/), so make sure to follow these steps for every paper you write.

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**Step 1: Keep track of your sources**

While you’re doing research and taking notes for your paper, make sure to record the source of each piece of information. One way that students commit plagiarism is by simply forgetting where an idea came from and unintentionally presenting it as their own.

You can easily avoid this pitfall by keeping your notes organised and compiling a list of citations as you go. Keep track of every source you consult – that includes not only books and journal articles, but also things like websites, magazine articles, and videos.

Then you can easily go back and check where you found a phrase, fact, or idea that you want to use in your paper.

**Step 2: Quote and paraphrase**

While writing your paper, if you want to share an idea or a piece of information from a source, you must either [paraphrase](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/how-to-paraphrase/) or [quote](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/how-to-quote/) the original text.

**Quoting**

Quoting means copying a piece of text word-for-word. The copied text must be introduced in your own words, enclosed in quotation marks, and correctly attributed to the original author:

According to Cronon, the concept of wilderness is a cultural invention: “Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation – indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history” (1995, p. 69).

**Paraphrasing**

Paraphrasing means using your own words to explain something from a source. It allows you to give only the most important information from a passage.

* [**Paraphrased text**](https://www.scribbr.co.uk/academic-dishonesty/avoiding-plagiarism/)

* [**Original text**](https://www.scribbr.co.uk/academic-dishonesty/avoiding-plagiarism/)

* [**Plagiarised text**](https://www.scribbr.co.uk/academic-dishonesty/avoiding-plagiarism/)

Before the 18th century, the word “wilderness” had very different associations than it does today. Far from being tourist attractions, wilderness areas were considered bleak, barren places that inspired fear and confusion – landscapes to be avoided rather than actively sought out (Cronon, 1995, p. 70).

In the paraphrased example, the author’s main point has been rephrased and condensed; the order of information and the sentence structure have been changed.

In the plagiarised example, even though the text is not identical, many of the same phrases have been used, and the information is presented in the same order with the same structure. Even with a citation, this passage would very likely be flagged as plagiarism.

To avoid plagiarism when paraphrasing, you need to make sure that your text isn’t too similar to the original.

**Paraphrasing vs. quoting**

In general, paraphrasing is better than quoting, especially for longer passages. It shows that you have fully understood the meaning of the original text, and ensures that your own voice is dominant in your paper.

Quotes are appropriate when:

* You are using an exact definition introduced by the original author
* It is impossible for you to rephrase the original text without losing its meaning
* You want to maintain the authority and style of the author’s words

Whether you paraphrase or quote, always build on your sources by adding your own ideas, interpretations and arguments.

**Step 3: Cite the original source**

Every time you quote or paraphrase, you must include an [in-text citation](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/in-text-citation-styles/) (or [footnote citation](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/what-are-footnotes-and-endnotes/)) that identifies the original author. It often also includes the publication year and a page number.

Each in-text citation must correspond to a full reference in the [reference list](https://www.scribbr.com/apa-style/apa-reference-page/) or [bibliography](https://www.scribbr.com/chicago-style/bibliography/) at the end of your paper. This details exactly where the information came from, allowing your readers to locate the source for themselves.

There are many different [citation styles](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/citation-styles/), and each one has its own rules for citing. Some of the most common include [APA](https://www.scribbr.com/category/apa-style/), [MLA](https://www.scribbr.com/category/mla/) and [Chicago Style](https://www.scribbr.co.uk/?cat_ID=6173). The most important thing is to apply one style consistently throughout the text.

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| --- | --- |
| **APA citation example** | |
| **In-text citation** | Recent research has shown that plagiarism is an increasingly widespread issue (Smith & Thomas, 2018, p. 34–36). |
| **Reference list entry** | Smith, T.H., & Thomas, L. (2018).*New challenges in higher education*. New York, NY: Free Press. |

To create correctly-formatted references in APA style, you can use our free reference generator.

**Step 4: Use a plagiarism checker**

Most universities use plagiarism checkers to detect plagiarism in student papers. This technology scans your document, compares it to a huge database of publications and websites, and highlights passages that are overly similar to other texts.

You can use a plagiarism checker yourself before submitting your paper. This allows you to identify any parts where you’ve forgotten a citation, left out quotation marks, or included a paraphrase that’s too close to the original text. Then you can follow the steps above to easily fix any instances of potential plagiarism