

Unit 6 - Avoiding plagiarism - Why do we document our work?

In any formal academic research/reporting, scholars have to document the sources they consulted and avoid the “p word” aka plagiarism. Plagiarism is using someone else’s ideas, concepts, or words without giving them credit. In the world of scholarship, this is a form of intellectual theft. Just like taking something that doesn’t belong to you without permission, in the world of research and scholarship, we want to avoid taking and using the ideas of others without acknowledging them and their work. That still begs the question: why?

Well, scholars avoid plagiarism first, out of respect for their colleagues. You always want to give credit where credit is due, and in the case of research, we depend upon our fellow historians and scholars to help us understand our topic. There’s more to it, though. There’s an old adage that we “stand on the shoulders of giants” of those who came before and that’s the case with historical scholarship. The understanding we have of our topic is based upon the work others have already done in the field. They’ve spent years (a lifetime in many cases) studying and analyzing the area we are working in. Their work is the foundation upon which you will build your study and your argument. We have to acknowledge that and respect it by crediting them. Remember too that as an historian you are engaging in a conversation with these scholars, your colleagues. You are sharing ideas, interpretations, and conclusions with your fellow historians. Acknowledging their arguments, the role they’ve played in your thought and work, is essential.

There are different ways we use the words and ideas of others in our own work and we have to be aware of the differences and the need to properly credit them. Have a look at the following from our friends at California State University San Marcos. In their guide to avoiding plagiarism they describe four types of usage:

1. **One Source.** When direct quotations are used, however, quotation format must be used and prompt acknowledgment is required. **Direct Quotation:** Every direct quote must be identified by quotation marks, or by appropriate indentation or by other means of identification, and must be properly cited according to either the MLA handbook for writers of research papers, or the Chicago manual of style. Remember: changing a word ‘or two’ is still essentially a direct quotation.
2. **Paraphrase:** Prompt acknowledgment is required when material from another source is **paraphrased or summarized** in whole or in part in one’s own words. To acknowledge a paraphrase properly, one might state: "to paraphrase Locke's comment..." and conclude with a citation identifying the exact reference. **A citation acknowledging only a directly quoted statement does not suffice to notify the reader of any preceding or succeeding paraphrased material.** Remember: simply changing a word or two does not make a paraphrase
3. **Borrowed Facts or Information:** Information obtained in one's reading or research which is **not common knowledge** among students in the course must be acknowledged. Examples of common knowledge might include the names of leaders of prominent nations, basic scientific laws, etc.
4. **Material** which contributes only to the student's general understanding of the subject may be acknowledged in the bibliography and need not be immediately cited. One citation is usually sufficient to

acknowledge indebtedness when a number of connected sentences in the paper draw their special information from.¹

One way we can avoid the dangers of plagiarism is by being very careful and organized in the collection of information from our research. Shannon Alicia O'Day prepared a wonderful lesson plan on scaffolding the research process that may help. Her worksheet, available via readwritethink.org follows below.

¹ CSUSanMarcos guide to Plagiarism. https://libguides.csusm.edu/plagiarism/tutorial_purpose This is an excellent refresher/primer you can adapt to your students' grade level.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Research Scaffold²

Research Question

Hook

What is interesting about this question? Hook your readers with an interesting fact that might make them curious about this topic.

² Shannon Alicia O'Day, *Scaffolding Methods for Research Paper Writing*, ReadWriteThink.org (2009) <https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/scaffolding-methods-research-paper> accessed 28 June, 2021.

Research Paper Scaffold (continued)

Literature Review (Research)

Find five articles about your topic and list the relevant facts from each one.

1. According to (author/source) (date) the main idea about this subject is

_____.

List facts from the source that support this idea

1.fact _____
2.fact _____ 3.fact _____
_____ 4.fact _____
_____ 5.fact _____

(You can add more facts as you find them.)

In conclusion _____ says _____

_____ about the topic.

2. Another idea, by (author/source) (date) is _____

_____.

List facts from the source that support this idea

1.fact _____
2.fact _____
3.fact _____
4.fact _____
5.fact _____

(You can add more facts as you find them.)

In conclusion _____ says _____

_____ about the topic.

3. A third scholar (author/source) (date) argues _____

_____.

List facts from the source that support this idea

- 1.fact _____
- 2.fact _____
- 3.fact _____
- 4.fact _____
- 5.fact _____

(You can add more facts as you find them.)

In conclusion _____ says _____
_____ about the topic.

4. According to a fourth source (author/source) (date) _____ . List facts from the source that support this idea

- 1.fact _____
- 2.fact _____
- 3.fact _____
- 4.fact _____
- 5.fact _____

(You can add more facts as you find them.)

In conclusion _____ says _____
_____ about the topic.

You can add as many of these guides as you choose.



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There are many videos available on avoiding plagiarism. A couple recommended ones include:

[Avoiding Plagiarism](#)

Avoiding Plagiarism game - <https://www.lycoming.edu/library/plagiarism-game/>