
MODULE 3: CITING SCHOLARLY WORK

LESSON 2: CITING AND PARAPHRASING

Title

Citing Scholarly Work

Module 3, Lesson 2

Citing and Paraphrasing

Introduction

Now that you understand the elements of a citation, it's time to take a look at how to incorporate citations into the main body of an academic paper. In this lesson, you will:

- » Gain an understanding of when and what to cite in your work
- » Learn the difference between quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing your sources
- » Learn how to cite sources within the body of your paper

When to Cite

When do you need to cite a source? Each time you incorporate someone else's information or idea into your own work, you must provide a citation. So, even if you are using your own words to describe another person's idea, it's still necessary to cite.

It's not always necessary to cite facts that are broadly known and accepted. These kinds of facts are called "common knowledge." For example, you don't need to provide a citation for the statement that Washington, D.C. is the capital of the United States. This is a widely known fact that can be confirmed in a variety of sources, and it's something that a good part of the population knows.

But you would need to cite a statement that the population of Washington, D.C. was 601,723 in 2010. This number is not common knowledge that most people would be aware of. Providing a citation here tells the reader whose statistics you are using.

There's no one set of guidelines about what information constitutes "common knowledge" and therefore does not need to be cited. Many experts recommend seeing whether a piece of information is available from a variety of sources. If it's published in a number of places, it's more likely to be common knowledge.

Common knowledge also varies between different groups. Think of your audience and ask whether this piece of information is something most of them already know.

If you are unsure about whether a citation is necessary, it's always better to provide one. It's much better to cite too heavily than to run the risk of plagiarism.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of another person's words or ideas without providing proper credit. When you think of the word "plagiarism," you might think of someone downloading a paper from the Internet or copying a classmate's work. But plagiarism is often not intentional, and it's much broader than just copying someone else's work. It can be as simple as:

- » Failing to include a citation for an idea you've restated in your own words
- » Paraphrasing in language that is too close to the original, or
- » Forgetting to put quotation marks around content from another writer's work

As a writer, you are responsible for avoiding plagiarism — and there's really no room for accidents. It's essential to be conscious of giving credit to your sources. Remember: When in doubt, cite.

Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing

There are different ways to use information from your sources in your own writing.

Quoting is the most straightforward: you use another writer's words exactly as they appear in the source material. When you quote a source, you must enclose the quoted material in quotation marks. This gives readers a visual cue that these are not your own words.

Paraphrasing means stating someone else's idea in your own words. When you paraphrase, you don't use quotation marks, so it is essential to reword significantly enough that the wording and sentence structure are your own.

Summarizing is writing your own description of a larger work or a body of ideas. As with paraphrasing, a summary needs to be your own words. No quotation marks are used here, so it's very important to distinguish your writing from the source's.

Whether you're quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing information from a source, you must provide a citation.

In-Text Citations

In general, a citation has two parts: a brief mention of the source within the body of the paper, and a more detailed list at the end of the paper, called a Works Cited page. Here, we'll be talking about the former type, which are called in-text citations.

In MLA and APA styles, an in-text citation is a brief mention of the source that appears within a set of parentheses. In-text citations follow quotations, paraphrases, and summaries that

appear as part of your text. MLA uses the author-page style of citation, which consists of the author's last name plus the page number where the quote or idea appears in the source material.

Sometimes it makes sense to incorporate the author's name into the sentence itself. This is fine to do, but you always need to include a page number in parentheses for print sources. The purpose of this citation is to tell the reader that the quote comes from page 23 of a publication by an author named Harris. If the reader wants to know more about this publication, she can look at the Works Cited page at the end of the paper, which will include a complete citation for this source.

APA style uses the author-date style rather than author-page, so an APA citation includes the author's last name and the year of publication. This citation looks slightly different, but it serves the same purpose: it gives the reader the information she needs to find a more detailed citation at the end of the paper.

In-Text Citations: Websites

For a source that has no page numbers, like a website, simply include the author's name, which will allow your reader to find the matching citation in the Works Cited list. As when citing a print source, you can provide the name in parentheses or incorporate it into your sentence.

Offset Citations

Sometimes you will need to use a longer quotation as a part of your work. Rather than being inserted into the rest of the text, longer quotations should be indented to make the distinction clear to the reader. Check your style guide to find the cutoff for when to indent, or offset, a quotation. In MLA style, offset a quotation when it makes up four or more lines of text.

Notice that when you offset a quotation, you don't use quotation marks around it. In this case, the formatting provides a clue to the reader that this is quoted material.

If the quoted material makes up less than four lines of text, it should appear as part of a normal paragraph, even if multiple sentences are quoted.

Next Steps

- » Next, you will complete a few practice activities related to what you've just learned.
- » Then, it's on to Lesson 3, Works Cited, Bibliographies, and Notes.
- » At the end of Module 3, you'll take an assessment of what you've learned in this lesson.