

You must include a citation when you quote from a source, when you summarize or paraphrase, and when you borrow facts that are not common knowledge. Borrowing another writer's language, sentence structure, or ideas without proper acknowledgment is plagiarism.

The only exception is common knowledge—information that your readers may know or could easily locate in any number of general sources. As a rule, when you have seen information repeatedly in your reading, you don't need to cite it.

54a Understand how the MLA system works.

In the MLA citation style, you acknowledge your sources in a system organized by in-text citation and a works cited list. Here, briefly, is how the MLA citation system usually works. (See 56 for more details and model citations.)

IN-TEXT CITATION

A signal phrase names the author and often gives credentials.

Bioethicist David Resnik emphasizes

that such policies “open the door to

excessive government control over food, which could restrict dietary choices,

interfere with cultural, ethnic, and religious

traditions, and exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities” (31).

The material being cited is followed by a page number in parentheses (unless

the source is an unpaginated web source) and then a period.

ENTRY IN THE LIST OF WORKS CITED

Resnik, David. “Trans Fat Bans and Human

Freedom.” *The American Journal of*

Bioethics, vol. 10, no. 3, Mar. 2010,

pp. 27–32.

At the end of the paper, a list of works cited gives complete publication information for the source.

NOTE: This basic MLA format varies for different types of sources. For a detailed discussion and other models, see 56.

Writing for an audience

When you cite sources, you show readers where information comes from so that they can judge if it is reliable and so that they can find the source on their own. You show respect for your audience when your citations guide them quickly to the source of a quoted, paraphrased, or summarized idea. Ask yourself two questions: How can I make my documentation useful to my readers? What would readers need to know to find the source themselves?

54b Understand what plagiarism is.

In a research paper, you draw on the work of other writers. To be fair and responsible, you must document their contributions by citing your sources. When you acknowledge and document your sources, you avoid plagiarism, a form of academic dishonesty. (See also 51c.)

In general, these three acts are considered plagiarism:

- (1) failing to cite quotations and borrowed ideas
- (2) failing to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks
- (3) failing to put summaries and paraphrases in your own words

Definitions of plagiarism vary; it's a good idea to find out how your school defines academic dishonesty.

54c Use quotation marks around borrowed language.

To indicate that you are using a source's exact phrases or sentences, you must enclose them in quotation marks unless they have been set off from the text by indenting (see 55b). To omit the quotation marks is to claim, falsely, that the language is your own, as in the example below. Such an omission is plagiarism even if you have cited the source.

- When you want to compare arguments or ideas from various sources
- When you want to provide readers with an understanding of the source's argument before you respond to it or launch your own argument

Paraphrasing

When you paraphrase, you express an author's ideas in your own words and sentence structure, using approximately the same number of words and details as in the source.

WHEN TO USE A PARAPHRASE

- When the ideas and information are important but the author's exact words are not needed
- When you want to restate the source's ideas in your own words
- When you need to simplify and explain a technical or complicated source
- When you need to reorder a source's ideas

★ **Using sources responsibly** When you use your own words to summarize or paraphrase, the original idea remains the intellectual property of the author, so you must include a citation. (See 54d.)

55b Use quotations effectively.

When you quote a source, you borrow the author's exact words and enclose them in quotation marks. Quotation marks show your readers that both the idea and the words belong to the author.

WHEN TO USE QUOTATIONS

- When language is especially vivid or expressive
- When exact wording is needed for technical accuracy
- When it is important to let the debaters of an issue explain their positions in their own words
- When the words of an authority lend weight to an argument
- When the language of a source is the topic of your discussion

HOW TO

Paraphrase effectively

A paraphrase shows your readers that you understand a source and can explain it to them. When you choose to paraphrase a passage, you use the information and ideas of a source for your own purpose—to provide background information, explain a concept, or advance your argument—and yet maintain your voice. It is challenging to write a paraphrase that isn't a word-for-word translation of the original source and doesn't imitate the source's sentence structure. These strategies will help you paraphrase effectively.

- 1 **Understand the source.** Identify the source's key points and argument. Test your understanding by asking questions: *What is being said? Why and how is it being said? Look up words you don't know to help you understand whole ideas, not just the words.*

ORIGINAL

People's vision of the world has broadened with the advent of global media such as television and the Internet. Those thinking about going elsewhere can see what the alternatives are and appear to have fewer inhibitions about resettling.

—Darrrell M. West, *Brain Gain: Rethinking U.S. Immigration Policy*. Brookings Institution Press, 2011, p. 5

STUDENT'S NOTES

- TV and Internet have opened our eyes, our minds
- We can imagine making big moves (country to country) as we never could before; the web offers a preview
- “resettling” = moving to a new location, out of the familiar region
- Lessens the anxiety about starting over in a new place

- 2 **Use your own vocabulary and sentence structure** to convey the source's information. Check to make sure there is no overlap in vocabulary or sentence structure with the original.

Since TV and the web can offer a preview of life in other places, people feel less uncertainty and anxiety about making moves from one area of the world to another.

3 Use a signal phrase to identify the source (*According to X*, _____, or *X argues that* _____).

West argues that since TV and the web can offer a preview of life in other places, people feel less uncertainty and anxiety about making moves from one area of the world to another.

4 Include a citation to give credit to the source. Even though the words are yours, you need to give credit for the idea. Here, the author's name and the page number on which the original passage appeared are listed.

West argues that since TV and the web can offer a preview of life in other places, people feel less uncertainty and anxiety about making moves from one area of the world to another (5).

NOTE: If you choose to use exact language from the source in a paraphrase, be sure to put quotation marks around any borrowed words or phrases.

West argues that since TV and the web can offer a preview of life in other places, people "have fewer inhibitions" about making moves from one area of the world to another (5).

Limiting your use of quotations

Keep the emphasis on your own ideas. It is not always necessary to quote full sentences from a source. Often you can integrate words and phrases from a source into your own sentence structure. (For the use of signal phrases in integrating quotations, see 55c.)

Resnik acknowledges that his argument relies on the "slippery slope" fallacy, but he insists that "social and political pressures" regarding food regulations make his concerns valid (31).

Using the ellipsis mark

To condense a quoted passage, you can use the ellipsis mark (three periods, with spaces between) to indicate that you have left words out. What remains must be grammatically complete.

In Mississippi, legislators passed "a ban on bans—a law that forbids . . . local restrictions on food or drink" (Conly A23).

The writer has omitted from the source the words *municipalities to place before local restrictions* to condense the quoted material. If you want to leave out one or more full sentences, use a period before the three ellipsis dots.

Legal scholars Gostin and Gostin argue that "individuals have limited willpower to defer immediate gratification for longer-term health benefits. . . . A person understands that high-fat foods or a sedentary lifestyle will cause adverse health effects, or that excessive spending or gambling will cause financial hardship, but it is not always easy to refrain" (217).

Ordinarily, do not use an ellipsis mark at the beginning or at the end of a quotation. Your readers will understand that you have taken the quoted material from a longer passage, so such marks are not necessary. The only exception occurs when you have dropped words at the end of the final quoted sentence. In such cases, put three ellipsis dots before the closing quotation mark and parenthetical reference.

★ **Using sources responsibly** Make sure that omissions and ellipsis marks do not distort the meaning of your source.

Using brackets

Brackets allow you to insert your own words into quoted material to clarify a confusing reference or to keep a sentence grammatical in the context of your own writing. You also use brackets to indicate that you are changing a letter from capital to lowercase (or vice versa) to fit into your sentence. In the following example, the writer inserted words in brackets to clarify the meaning of *help*.

Neergaard and Agiesta argue that "a new poll finds people are split on how much the government should do to help [find solutions to

the national health crisis] — and most draw the line at attempts to force healthier eating.”

To indicate an error such as a misspelling in a quotation, insert the word “sic” in brackets right after the error.

“While Americans of every race, gender and ethnicity are affected by this disease, diabetes disproportionately affects [sic] minority populations.”

Setting off long quotations

When you quote more than four typed lines of prose or more than three lines of poetry, set off the quotation by indenting it one-half inch from the left margin.

Long quotations should be introduced by an informative sentence, usually followed by a colon. Quotation marks are unnecessary because the indented format tells readers that the passage is taken word for word from the source.

In response to critics who claim that laws aimed at stopping us from eating whatever we want are an assault on our freedom of choice, Conly offers a persuasive counterargument:

[L]aws aren't designed for each one of us individually. Some of us can drive safely at 90 miles per hour, but we're bound by the same laws as the people who can't, because individual speeding laws aren't practical. Giving up a little liberty is something we agree to when we agree to live in a democratic society that is governed by laws. (A23)

At the end of an indented quotation, the parenthetical citation goes outside the final mark of punctuation. (When a quotation is run into your text, the opposite is true. See the sample citations in the ellipsis mark section earlier in 55b.)

55c Use signal phrases to integrate sources.

Whenever you include a paraphrase, summary, or direct quotation of another writer's work in your paper, prepare your readers for it with introductory words called a *signal phrase*. A signal phrase

usually names the author of the source, provides some context for the source material — such as the author's credentials — and helps readers distinguish your ideas from those of the source.

Using signal phrases in MLA papers

To avoid monotony, try to vary both the language and the placement of your signal phrases.

Model signal phrases

Michael Pollan, who has written extensively about Americans' unhealthy eating habits, argues that . . .

As health policy experts Melillo and others point out, . . .
Marion Nestle, New York University professor of nutrition and public health, notes, . . .

Bioethicist David Resnik acknowledges that his argument . . .
In response to critics, Conly offers a persuasive counterargument: . . .

Verbs in signal phrases

acknowledges	comments	endorses	reasons
adds	compares	grants	refutes
admits	confirms	illustrates	rejects
agrees	confounds	implies	reports
argues	declares	insists	responds
asserts	denies	notes	suggests
believes	disputes	observes	thinks
claims	emphasizes	points out	writes

When you write a signal phrase, choose a verb that fits with the way you are using the source (see 53d). Are you providing background, explaining a concept, supporting a claim, lending authority, or refuting a belief?

▶ Lotine Goodwin, a food historian, [^]rejects the claim says: “. . .”

NOTE: MLA style calls for verbs in the present tense or present perfect tense (*argues*, *has argued*) to introduce source material unless you include a date that specifies the time of the original author's writing.