

5

Writing Notes

The inventor Thomas Edison depended upon documented research by others. He built upon their beginnings. How fortunate he was that his predecessors recorded their experiments. They kept good notes. Scholarship is the sharing of information. The primary reason for any research paper is to announce and publicize new findings. A botanist explains the discovery of a new strain of ferns in Kentucky's Land Between the Lakes. A medical scientist reports the results of cancer research. A sociologist announces the results of a two-year pilot study of Native Americans in the Appalachian region.

Similarly, you must explain your findings from a geology field trip, disclose research on illegal dumping of medical waste, or discuss the results of an investigation into overcrowding of school classrooms. You will often support your position by citing the experts in the field, so accuracy in your quotations and paraphrases is essential.

Accordingly, you will need to write notes of high quality so that they fit appropriate places in your outline, as discussed in Chapter 3. In addition, you will need to write different types of notes that reflect your evaluation of the sources—quotations for well-phrased passages by authorities but paraphrased or summarized notes for less notable materials. This chapter explains the following types of notes:

Personal notes (5b) expressing your own ideas as opposed to borrowed viewpoints or a string of quotations.

Quotation notes (5c) preserving the wisdom and distinguished syntax of an authority.

Paraphrase notes (5d) interpreting and restating what the authority has said.

Summary notes (5e) distilling factual data that has marginal value; you can return to the source later if necessary.

Précis notes (5f) capturing the essence of one writer's ideas in capsule form.

Field notes (5g) recording interviews, questionnaire tabulations, lab experiments, and various types of field research.

Note: The Internet now offers many articles that you can print or download to a file. Treat these as you would a printed source; that is, develop notes from them that you can transfer into your draft. If you download an article to your files, you can mark passages and transfer them quickly into your notes or draft. See pages 158–60.

5a Creating Effective Notes

Whether you write your notes with word processing or by hand, you should keep in mind some basic rules:

1. *Write one item per note.* One item of information for each note facilitates shuffling and rearranging the data during all stages of organization. On a computer make single files for each note or one file with notes labeled and recorded for easy retrieval.
2. *List the source.* Abbreviate the exact source (for example, “Thorn-ton 431” or “Smith, 1998, p. 62”) to serve as a quick reference to the full address. Make it a practice to list name, year, and page number on your notes; then you will be ready to make in-text citations for MLA, APA, or other academic styles.
3. *Label each note.* Arrange your notes by describing each one (for example, “objectivity on television”) or by putting one of your outline headings on it (for example, “Television as a presentation”).
4. *Write a full note.* When you have a source in your hands, write full, well-developed sentences to speed the writing of your first draft. They may require editing, later, to fit the context of your draft. Avoid photocopying everything because the writing will remain to be done at a later time.
5. *Keep everything.* Try to save every card, sheet, scrap, and note in order to authenticate dates, page numbers, or full names.
6. *Label your personal notes.* To distinguish your thoughts with those from authorities, label personal ideas with “PER” (personal note), “my idea,” “mine,” or “personal note.”
7. *Conform to conventions of research style.* This suggestion is somewhat premature, but if you know it, write your notes to conform to your discipline—MLA, APA, CBE, Chicago—as shown briefly below and explained later in this book.

MLA: Lawrence Smith states, “The suicidal teen causes severe damage to the psychological condition of peers” (34).

APA: Smith (1997) has commented, “The suicidal teen causes severe damage to the psychological condition of peers” (p. 34).

Chicago footnote: Lawrence Smith states, "The suicidal teen causes severe damage to the psychological condition of peers."³

CBE Number: Smith (4) has commented, "The suicidal teen causes severe damage to the psychological condition of peers."

The *default* style shown in this chapter is MLA. Figure 28 provides another sample of MLA style with sidebars to direct you to detailed instructions.

Identifying sources, 7a, 156-57

Darrel Abel in his third volume of American Literature narrates the hardships of the Samuel Clemens family in Hannibal, yet Abel asserts that "despite such hardships, and domestic grief which included the deaths of a brother and sister, young Sam Clemens [Mark Twain] had a happy and reasonably carefree boyhood" (11-12).

Using lower case after that, 7n, 169

Abel acknowledges the value of Clemens's "rambling reminiscences dictated as an 'Autobiography' in his old age" (12). Of those days Clemens says, "In the small town . . . everybody [my underlining] was poor, but didn't know it; and everybody was comfortable, and did know it" (qtd. in Abel 12). Clemens felt at home in Hannibal with everybody at the same level of poverty.

Underscoring, 8b, 212-14

Interpolations, 7o, 171-72

Page citations, 7a, 156-57

Single quotation marks, 8b, 208-9

Punctuation with quotations, 7j, 164-66

Ellipses points, 7n, 169-71

Signaling your underscoring of another's words, 7o, 171-72

One source quotes another, 7f, 160

Figure 28

Conventions of style for writing notes.

Using a Computer for Note Taking

The computer affects note taking strategies in several ways:

1. You can enter your notes into the word processor using one of two methods:
 - a. Write each note as a separate temporary file under a common directory so that each can be moved later into the appropriate section of your TEXT file by a COPY, READ, or INSERT

command. In other words, you should first create a directory, perhaps with the title *FAULKNER*. Second, build a set of files, each with its distinctive title, perhaps the name of a critic, *WATSON*, the name of a character, *SNOPE*, or the name of an issue, *GREED*. Periodically, you ought to print a hard copy of these notes, which should include the name of the file. You can then edit them on the printed sheets as well as on the computer monitor. *Note:* your instructor may also request a copy of these notes. Or:

- b. Write all notes into a single file, labeled with a short title, such as "NOTES." With this method, your notes will be gathered in *one* file, not numerous ones. It is advisable to give each new note a code word or phrase. When you begin the actual writing of the paper, you merely open this same file of notes and begin writing at the top of the file, which will push the notes down as you write. When you need one of your notes, you can use FIND or SEARCH with the code word(s) or you can scan down through the file to find the appropriate note. Again, printing a hard copy of the notes before beginning the actual writing will provide reference points for your work. You can also move your notes easily within the one document by CUT and PASTE moves or BLOCK and COPY moves that will transfer them quickly into your text. With luck, you will finish the paper at the same time you exhaust your notes.
2. Computer notes, once keyboarded, will not need retyping. You need only move the note into your rough draft and then revise it to fit the context (see Chapter 7, "Blending Reference Material into Your Writing").
3. You can record the bibliography information for each source you encounter by listing it in a BIBLIO file so that you build the necessary list of references in one alphabetical file. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 give you the correct forms.

Developing Handwritten Notes

Handwritten notes should conform to these additional conventions:

1. *Use ink.* Write notes legibly in ink because penciled notes become blurred after repeated shuffling of the cards.
2. If you are writing by hand, use *index cards*. In fact, you might want to use two sizes of cards, one for notes and one for bibliography entries. This practice keeps the two separate.
3. *Write on one side of a card.* Material on the back of a card may be overlooked. Use the back side, if at all, for personal notes and observations, but mark the front with "OVER." Staple together two or more cards.

5b Writing Personal Notes

During your research, record *your* thoughts on the issues by writing plenty of personal notes in your research journal. Personal notes are essential because they allow you to express your discoveries, to reflect on the findings, to make connections, to explore another point of view, and to identify prevailing views and patterns of thought.

Remember, the content of a research paper is not a collection of ideas transmitted by experts in books and articles; it is an expression of your own ideas as supported by the scholarly evidence. Readers are primarily interested in *your* thesis sentence, *your* topic sentences, and *your* personal view of the issues.

Personal notes should conform to these standards:

1. The idea on the note is exclusively yours.
2. The note is labeled with "my idea," "mine," "personal thought" so that later you can be certain that it has not been borrowed.
3. The note can be a rough summary, an abstract sketch of ideas, or a complete sentence or two. Most personal notes will need to be revised later when you draft the paper.
4. The note lists other authorities who address this same issue.
5. The jottings in your research journal are original and not copied from the sources.

A sample of a personal note follows:

My note

—
Geraldo, Morton Downey, Jr., Oprah, and all the others will sometimes uncover a bit of truth out of the weird people interviewed, but any sense of objectivity goes out the window.

5c Writing Direct Quotation Note Cards

Copying the words of another person is the easiest type of note to write. However, you must obey the conventional rules.

1. Select quoted material that is worthy of quotation and well written, not something trivial or something that is common knowledge. NOT "John F. Kennedy was a democrat from Massachusetts" (Rupert 233) BUT "John F. Kennedy's Peace Corp left a legacy of lasting compassion for the downtrodden" (Rupert 233).
2. Use quotation marks correctly. Do not copy the words of a source into your paper in such a way that readers will think *you* wrote the material.

3. Use the author's exact words and punctuation.
4. Provide an in-text citation to author and page number, like this (Henson 34–35), or give the author's name at the beginning of the quotation and put the page number after the quotation, like this:

Cohen, Adoni, and Bantz label the construction a social process “in which human beings act both as the creators and products of the social world” (34).

5. The in-text citation goes *outside* the final quotation mark but *inside* the period.
6. Write notes from both primary sources (original words by a writer or speaker) and secondary sources (comments after the fact about original works). See Section 4d, “Selecting a Mix of Both Primary and Secondary Sources,” pages 95–96.
7. Try to quote key sentences and short passages, not entire paragraphs. Find the essential statement and feature it; do not force your reader to fumble through a long quoted passage in search of the relevant statement. Make the quotation a part of your work, in this way:

Tabloid television is not merely the news as much as it is entertainment. For example, one source notes that “the networks live by the dictum ‘keep it short and to the point’” so they make the news “lively” (Kuklinsky and Sigelman 821).

Quoting the Primary Sources

Frequent quotation of *primary sources* is necessary because you should cite poetry, fiction, drama, letters, and interviews. In other cases, you may want to quote liberally from a presidential speech, quote a businessman, or reproduce computer data. As shown in the next example, quote exactly, retain spacing and margins, and spell words as in the original.

Images of frustration in Eliot's “Prufrock,” 5

 “For I have known them all already,
 known them all:--
 Have known the evenings, mornings,
 afternoons,
 I have measured out my life with
 coffee spoons;
 I know the voices dying with a
 dying fall
 Beneath the music of a farther room.
 So how should I presume?”

The student has copied an entire unit of the poem even though she may use only a line or two. Having in her notes an entire verse (or entire paragraph of prose) assures accuracy in handling the quotation within the body of the research paper. With a computer note, you should double-space all material so that you can transfer it, without alteration, into your text.

Quoting the Secondary Sources

Quote from secondary sources for three specific reasons:

1. To display excellence in ideas *and* expression by the source.
2. To explain complex material.
3. To set up a statement of your own, especially if it spins off, adds to, or takes exception to the source as quoted.

The overuse of direct quotation from secondary sources indicates either (1) that you did not have a clear focus and copied verbatim just about everything related to the subject, or (2) that you had inadequate evidence and used numerous quotations as padding. Therefore, limit quotations from secondary sources by using only a phrase or a sentence.

Incorporate a quoted phrase into your note by making it a grammatical part of your sentence, as shown in this note:

The geographical changes in Russia require "intensive political analysis" (German 611).

If you quote an entire sentence, make the quotation a direct object. It tells *what* the authority says. Headings on your notes will help you arrange them.

Geographic changes in Russia

In response to the changes in Russia, one critic notes, "The American government must exercise caution and conduct intensive political analysis" (German 611).

The next writer develops two separate notes and then blends the two quotation notes to build a paragraph.

Note 1:

TV as Reality

Keller 202

"For shows that are often referred to as 'reality' shows, there's a lot of theatre going on. 'Current Affair' and 'America's Most Wanted' are the most extreme, but others indulge in their share of re-creations. The problem is that the line between news/entertainment, fact/fiction, accuracy/effect is more than blurred--it's intentionally trampled."

Note 2:

TV & Objectivity

Schiller 2

“News reports repeatedly claim that, ideally at least, they recount events without the intrusion of value judgments or symbols. News is a map, a verifiable representation, a report on reality, and hence not really a story at all, but merely the facts--this is the claim. But news--akin to any literary or cultural form--must rely upon conventions. Formally created and substantially embodied conventions alone can be used to contrive the illusion of objectivity. How else could we recognize news as a form of knowledge?”

Draft (Incorporates the Two Notes):

Don Schiller says that we accept television news as reality because “news--akin to any literary or cultural form--must rely upon conventions. . . . to contrive the illusion of objectivity” (2), while Teresa Keller proclaims that “the problem is that the line between news/entertainment, fact/fiction, accuracy/effect is more than blurred--it’s intentionally trampled” (202).

Additional examples of handling quoted materials can be found in Chapter 7.

5d Writing Paraphrased Notes

A paraphrase is the most difficult note to write. It requires you to restate in your own words the thought, meaning, and attitude of someone else. The paraphrase maintains the sound of your voice, sustains your style, and avoids an endless string of direct quotations. It both interprets and rewrites. With *interpretation* you act as a bridge between the source and the reader as you capture the wisdom of the source in approximately the same number of words. Your *rewriting*, developed by careful reading and evaluation of the sources, requires you to (1) name the source, (2) indicate the source’s attitude (i.e., positive, negative, ironic), and (3) rewrite the material as shown here: “Morris Smith condemns a defendant’s claim that he or she is a victim” (21).

Keep in mind these five rules for paraphrasing a source:

1. Rewrite the original in about the same number of words.
2. Provide an in-text citation to the source (the author and page number in MLA style).
3. Retain exceptional words and phrases from the original by enclosing them within quotation marks.
4. Preserve the tone of the original by suggesting moods of satire, anger, humor, doubt, and so on. Show the author’s attitude with

appropriate verbs: “Edward Zigler condemns . . . defends . . . argues . . . explains . . . observes . . . defines.”

- Put the original aside while paraphrasing to avoid copying word for word. Return to the original for comparison of the finished paraphrase with the original source to be certain that the paraphrase truly rewrites the original and that it uses quotation marks with any phrasing or key words retained from the original.

Note: When instructors see an in-text citation but no quotation marks, they will assume that you are paraphrasing, not quoting. Be sure that their assumption is true.

Here are examples that show the differences between a quotation note and a paraphrased one.

Quotation:

Heredity Hein 294

Fred Hein explains, “Except for identical twins, each person’s heredity is unique” (294).

Paraphrased Note:

Heredity Hein 294

Fred Hein explains that heredity is special and distinct for each of us, unless a person is one of identical twins (294).

Quotation Note (More Than Four Lines):

Heredity Hein 294

Fred Hein clarifies the phenomenon:

Since only half of each parent’s chromosomes are transmitted to a child and since this half represents a chance selection of those the child could inherit, only twins that develop from a single fertilized egg that splits in two have identical chromosomes. (294)

(Note: In MLA style, long quotations require a 10-space indentation.)

Paraphrased Note:

Heredity Hein

Hein specifies that twins have identical chromosomes because they grow from one egg that divides after it has been fertilized. He affirms that most brothers and sisters differ because of the “chance selection” of chromosomes transmitted by each parent (294).

Remember that paraphrasing keeps the length of the note about the same as the original but converts the original into your own language and style. Place any key wording of the source within quotation marks.

5e Writing Summary Notes

You may write two types of summary notes: one, a quick sketch of material, as discussed here and, two, the more carefully drawn *précis*, as explained next in Section 5f.

The *summary note* describes and rewrites the source material without great concern for style or expression. Your purpose at the moment will be quick, concise writing without careful wording. If its information is needed, you can rewrite it later in a clear, appropriate prose style and, if necessary, return to the source for revision. Use summary notes for several types of information:

1. Source material that appears to have marginal value
2. Facts that do not fit a code word or an outline heading
3. Statistics that have questionable value for your study
4. The interesting position of a source speaking on a closely related subject but not on your specific topic
5. A reference to several works that address the same issue, as shown in this example:

This problem of waste disposal has been examined in books by West and Loveless and in articles by Jones et al., Coffee and Street, and Abernathy.

Like other notes, a summary needs documentation of the author and page number. However, a page number is unnecessary when the note summarizes the entire article, not a specific passage.

TV & Reality

Epstein's Book

Now dated but cited by various sources, the 1973 book by Epstein seems to lay the groundwork for criticism of distorted news broadcasts.

Eventually, this summary note was incorporated into the final draft of one student's research paper, as shown here:

Television viewers, engulfed in the world of communication, participate in the construction of symbolic reality by their perception of and belief in the presentation. Edward Jay Epstein laid the groundwork for such investigation in 1973 by showing in case after case how the networks distorted the news and did not, perhaps could not, represent reality.

5f Writing Précis Notes

A *précis* note differs from the quick summary note. It serves a specific purpose, so it deserves a polished style for transfer into the paper. It requires you to capture in just a few words the ideas of an entire paragraph, section, or chapter. Use the *précis* for these reasons:

- To review an article or book
- To annotate a bibliography entry
- To provide a plot summary
- To create an abstract

Success with the *précis* requires the following:

1. Condense the original with precision and directness. Reduce a long paragraph into a sentence, tighten an article into a brief paragraph, and summarize a book into a page.
2. Preserve the tone of the original. If the original is serious, suggest that tone in the *précis*. In the same way, retain moods of doubt, skepticism, optimism, and so forth.
3. Write the *précis* in your own language. However, retain exceptional phrases from the original, enclosing them in quotation marks. Guard against taking material out of context.
4. Provide documentation to the source and page.

Use the Précis to Review Briefly an Article or Book

The review of literature, see pages 99–103, will require you to briefly describe the contents of various articles and books. Note this example of the short review:

On the "Fairness Doctrine"

CQR 370

 The CQ Researcher indicates that Congress has begun efforts to implement again the "fairness doctrine," which the Federal Communications Commission repealed in 1987. The law would require stations to air equal sides of an argument. Talk show hosts, as might be expected, are fighting the legislation.

With three sentences, the writer has made a *précis* of the entire article. The next *précis* note reviews two entire articles in only a few words.

On Proliferation of Talk Shows

McClellan

 Steven McClellan has two closely related articles on this subject, but both are about the proliferation of talk shows. He opens both with "Talk, Talk, Talk."

Use the Précis to Write an Annotated Bibliography

An annotation is a sentence or paragraph that offers explanatory or critical commentary on an article or book. The précis can serve you in this case because it explains the contents of a source, as shown here:

Steele, Janet. "TV's Talking Headaches." Columbia Journalism Review 31.2 (1992): 49–52. This writer examines the networks' use of experts to comment on national and international events. She finds, however, that persons with real expertise in the history of a country, its language, and its customs are bypassed for experts who have contacts, can telephone the right people, and explain what's happening, whether it is true or not.

This annotation briefly clarifies the nature of the work. It seldom extends beyond two or three sentences. The difficulty of this task is to capture the main idea of the source. (See also 4e, "Preparing an Annotated Bibliography," pages 97–99.)

Use the Précis in a Plot Summary Note

In just a few sentences a précis summarizes a novel, short story, drama, or similar literary work, as shown by this next note:

Great Expectations by Dickens describes young Pip, who inherits money and can live the life of a gentleman. But he discovers that his "great expectations" have come from a criminal. With that knowledge his attitude changes from one of vanity to one of compassion.

Furnish a plot summary in your paper as a courtesy to your readers to cue them about the contents of a work. *Caution:* Make the plot summary a précis to avoid a full-blown retelling of the whole plot.

Use the Précis as the Form for an Abstract

An abstract is a brief description that appears at the beginning of an article to summarize the contents. It is, in truth, a précis. Usually, it is written by the article's author, and it helps readers make decisions about reading or skipping the article. You can find entire volumes devoted to abstracts, such as *Psychological Abstracts* or *Abstracts of English Studies*. An abstract is required for most papers in the social and natural sciences. Here's a sample from one student's paper.

This study examines the problems of child abuse, especially the fact that families receive attention after abuse occurs, not before. With statistics on the rise, efforts devoted to prevention rather than coping should focus on parents in order to discover those

adults most likely to commit abuse because of heredity, their own childhood experiences, the economy, and mental depression. Viewing the parent as a victim, not just a criminal, will enable social agencies to institute preventive programs that may control abuse and hold together family units.

(See also pages 291–92 for the use of the abstract in a paper that uses the APA style.)

5g Writing Notes from Field Research

You will be expected to conduct field research in some instances. This work will require different kinds of notes kept on charts, cards, note pads, laboratory notebooks, a research journal, or the computer.

If you *interview* knowledgeable people, make careful notes during the interview and transcribe those notes to your draft in a polished form. A tape recorder can serve as a backup to your notetaking; however, *do* get permission. In some states it is a criminal offense to tape a conversation without expressed consent.

If you conduct a survey using a *questionnaire*, the results will become valuable data for developing notes and graphs and charts for your research paper.

If you conduct *experiments*, *tests*, and *measurements*, the findings serve as your notes for the “results” section of the report and will give you the basis for the “discussion” section. (See page 67.)

5h Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is purposely using another’s person’s writing as your own. It is a serious breach of ethics. Knowledgeable, ethical behavior is necessary whenever you handle sources and cite the words of other people.

Documenting Your Sources for a Purpose

Blending the sources into your text is a major part of the assignment as explained in Chapter 7. You will get credit if you:

- Cite borrowed ideas
- Quote a well-worded phrase (with appropriate credit to the speaker)
- Summarize the best ideas on a topic as expressed by several of the best minds (provided again that you name them).

Research writing is an exercise in critical thinking that tests your ability to collect ideas and then to share them in clear, logical progression. Therefore, one of your roles as researcher is to share with the reader the fundamental

scholarship on a narrow topic. You will explain not only the subject matter, *the dangers of air bags*, but also the *literature* of the topic, the articles from the Internet and current periodicals. Rather than secretly stuffing your paper with plagiarized materials, announce boldly the name of your sources to let readers know the scope of your reading on the subject, as in this student's note:

Christianity and Political Activists

Commenting on the political activities of the Christian coalition within the Republican party, Steven V. Roberts makes this observation in U. S. News and World Report: "These incidents have triggered a backlash among establishment Republicans who fear that religious conservatives are pulling their party too far to the right and undermining their ability to win national elections" (43).

This sentence serves the reader, who can identify the political spokesman of a national news magazine. It gives clear evidence of the writer's investigation into the subject. It is intellectually honest.

Critical Thinking Tip

To avoid plagiarism, develop personal notes full of your own ideas on a topic. Discover how you feel about the issue. Then, rather than copy sources onto your pages of text, try to synthesize the ideas of the authorities with your own thoughts by using the précis and the paraphrase. Rethink and reconsider ideas gathered by your reading, make meaningful connections, and when you refer to a specific source—as you inevitably will—give it credit.

Understanding Plagiarism So You Can Avoid It

Fundamentally, the plagiarist offers the words or ideas of another person as his/her own. A major violation is the use of another student's work or the purchase of a "canned" research paper. Also flagrantly dishonest are writers who knowingly use sources without documentation (see student version A, page 120). These two instances of plagiarism are cause enough for failure in the course.

A gray area in plagiarism is a student's carelessness that results in an error. For example, the writer fails to enclose quoted material within quotation marks, yet he or she provides an in-text citation (perhaps because the note card was mislabeled or carelessly written); or the writer's paraphrase never quite becomes paraphrase—too much of the original is left intact (see student version B, page 121). Although these cases are not flagrant instances of plagiarism, these students face the scrutiny of instructors who demand precision in citations.

Admittedly, a double standard exists. Magazine writers and newspaper reporters quote people constantly without documentation. But as an academic writer, you must document original ideas borrowed from source materials. The reason goes back to this chapter's opening discussion. Like Thomas Edison's, your research in any area borrows from others and advances your findings and theory. Somebody else, perhaps, will continue your research and carry it to another level. Without proper documentation on your part, the research will grind to a halt.

Rules for Avoiding Plagiarism

1. Let the reader know when you begin borrowing from a source by introducing the quotation or paraphrase with the name of the authority.
2. Enclose within quotation marks all quoted materials.
3. Make certain that paraphrased material has been rewritten into your own style and language. The simple rearrangement of sentence patterns is unacceptable.
4. Provide specific in-text documentation for each borrowed item, but keep in mind that styles differ for MLA, APA, the number system, and the footnote system (see Chapters 9–11).
5. Provide a bibliography entry in the "Works Cited" for every source cited in the paper.

Quotation marks are an absolute *must* when using someone else's exact words. Citing a page number to the source is good, but you must also put quotation marks around a key word, a phrase, or a clause if the words are not your own.

These are the rules, but facts available as common knowledge are exceptions. Even though you might read it in a source, you need not cite the fact that Illinois is known as the "Land of Lincoln," that Chicago is its largest city, or that Springfield is the capital city. Information of this sort requires *no* in-text citation, as shown in the following example.

The flat rolling hills of Illinois form part of the great midwestern Corn Belt. It stretches from its border with Wisconsin in the north to the Kentucky border in the south. Its political center is Springfield in the center of the state, but its industrial/commercial center is Chicago, that great boisterous city camped on the shores of Lake Michigan.

However, if you borrow specific ideas or exact wording from a source, you must provide an in-text citation to the source.

Early Indian tribes on the plains called themselves Illiniwek (which meant strong men), and French settlers pronounced the name Illinois (Angle 44).

Here are two more examples: the first needs no documentation, but the second does because the opinion belongs to the source.

President George Bush launched the Desert Storm attack against Iraq with the support of allies and their troops from several nations.

Bush demonstrated great mastery in his diplomatic unification of a politically diverse group of allies (Wolford 46).

Checklist for Common Knowledge Exceptions

Would an intelligent person know this information?

Did you know it before you discovered it in the source?

Is it encyclopedia-type information?

Has this information become general knowledge by being reported repeatedly in many different sources?

The next four examples in MLA style will demonstrate the differences between genuine research writing and plagiarism. First is the original reference material; it is followed by four student versions, two of which constitute plagiarism and two of which do not.

Original Material

Despite the growth of these new technologies and the importance of the mass media in our lives, our schools have failed to do anything in the way of developing a systematic curriculum aimed at helping students to understand the form, content, ownership, and organization of the mass media.—David M. Considine, "Visual Literacy and the Curriculum: More to It Than Meets the Eye," *Language Arts* 64 (1987): 635.

While schools continue to operate as though print were the main means of communication in our culture, an increasingly high-tech society requires a new definition of literacy that encompasses visual, computer, and media literacy.—Considine 639.

Student Version A (Unacceptable)

Despite new technology that makes the mass media important in our lives, the schools have failed to develop a systematic curriculum aimed at helping students to understand television. In fact, schools operate as though print were the main means of communication in our culture. But young people have a high-tech, visual sense of communication.

This piece of writing is a clear example of plagiarism. Material stolen without documentation is obvious. The writer has simply borrowed abundantly from the original source, even to the point of retaining the essential wording. The writer has provided no documentation whatsoever, nor has the

writer named the authority. In truth, the writer implies to the reader that these sentences are an original creation when, actually, nothing belongs to the writer.

The next version is better, but it still demonstrates blatant disregard for scholarly conventions.

Student Version B (Unacceptable)

Modern communication technology is here to stay and cannot be ignored. We live in the information age, bombarded by television and radio in our homes and automobiles, annoyed by ringing telephones, and infatuated by computers and their modems for networking across the nation. Despite this new technology that makes the mass media important in our lives, the schools have failed to develop a systematic curriculum aimed at helping students to understand television. In fact, schools operate as though print were the main means of communication in our culture. But young people have a high-tech, visual sense of communication (Considine 635–39).

Although this version provides original opening sentences by the student and a citation to the authority David Considine, it contains two serious errors. First, readers cannot know that the citation "(Considine 635–39)" refers to most of the paragraph; readers can only assume that the citation refers to the final sentence. Second, the borrowing from Considine is not paraphrased properly; it contains far too much of Considine's language—words that should be enclosed within quotation marks.

The next version is correct and proper.

Student Version C (Acceptable)

Modern communication technology is here to stay and cannot be ignored. We live in the information age, bombarded by television and radio in our homes and automobiles, annoyed by ringing telephones, and infatuated by computers and their modems for networking across the nation. **David Considine** sees the conflict as chalk boards and talking by teachers versus an environment of electronic marvels (635). He argues, "While schools continue to operate as though print were the main means of communication in our culture, an increasingly high-tech society requires a new definition of literacy that encompasses visual, computer, and media literacy" (639).

This version represents a satisfactory handling of the source material. The authority is acknowledged at the outset of the borrowing, a key section has been paraphrased in the student's own words with a correct page citation to Considine's article, and another part has been quoted directly with page citation at the end.

Let's suppose, however, that the writer does not wish to quote directly at all. The following example shows a paraphrased version:

Student Version D (Acceptable)

Modern communication technology is here to stay and cannot be ignored. We live in the information age, bombarded by television and radio in our homes and automobiles, annoyed by ringing telephones, and infatuated by computers and their modems for networking across the nation. David Considine sees the conflict as chalk boards and talking by teachers versus an environment of electronic marvels (635). He argues that our public schools function with print media almost exclusively, while the children possess a complex feel and understanding of modern electronics in their use of computers, television, and other media forms (639).

This version also represents a satisfactory handling of the source material. In this case, no direct quotation is employed, and the authority is acknowledged and credited, yet the entire paragraph is paraphrased in the student's own language.

Required Instances for Citing a Source

1. An original idea derived from a source, whether quoted or paraphrased.

Genetic engineering, by which a child's body shape and intellectual ability is predetermined, raises memories of Nazi attempts in eugenics (Riddell 19).

2. Your summary of original ideas by a source.

Genetic engineering has been described as the rearrangement of the genetic structure in animals or in plants, which is a technique that takes a section of DNA and reattaches it to another section (Rosenthal 19-20).

3. Factual information that is not common knowledge.

Genetic engineering has its risks: a nonpathogenic organism might be converted into a pathogenic one or an undesirable trait might develop as a result of a mistake (Madigan 51).

4. Any exact wording copied from a source.

Kenneth Woodward asserts that genetic engineering is "a high stakes moral rumble that involves billions of dollars and affects the future" (68).