**Research and working with Sources: Why we need to cite sources**

**Definition**

A citation is a reference to a published or unpublished source that you consulted and obtained information from while writing your research paper. The way in which you document your sources depends on the writing style manual your professor wants you to use for the class [e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago, Turabian, etc.]. Note that some disciplines have their own citation method [e.g., law].

## Importance of a Citing your Sources

Citations show your readers where you obtained your material, provides a means of critiquing your study, and offers the opportunity to obtain additional information about the research problem under investigation. The act of citing sources is also a defense against allegations of plagiarism.

**Properly citing the works of others is important because:**

1. **Proper citation allows readers to locate the materials you used**. Citations to other sources helps readers expand their knowledge on a topic. In most social sciences disciplines, one of the most effective strategies for locating authoritative, relevant sources about a topic is to follow footnotes or references from known sources ["citation tracking"].
2. **Citing other people's words and ideas indicates that you have conducted a thorough review of the literature on your topic** and, therefore, you are operating from an informed perspective. This increases your credibility as the author of the work.
3. **Other researcher's ideas can be used to reinforce your arguments**, or, if you disagree with them, can act as positions from which to argue an alternative viewpoint. In many cases, another researcher's arguments can act as the primary context from which you can emphasize a different viewpoint or to clarify the importance of what you are proposing.
4. **Just as other researcher's ideas can bolster your arguments and act as evidence for your ideas, they can also detract from your credibility if they are found to be mistaken or fabricated**. Properly citing information not unique to you prevents your reputation from being tarnished if the facts or ideas of others are proven to be inaccurate or off-base.
5. **Outside academe, ideas are considered intellectual property and there can serious repercussions if you fail to cite where you got an idea from**. In the professional world, failure to cite other people's intellectual property ruins careers and reputations and can result in legal action. Given this, it is important to get into the habit of citing sources.

**NOTE**:**In any academic writing, you are required to identify for your reader which ideas, facts, theories, concepts, etc., are yours and which are derived from the research and thoughts of others.**Whether you summarize, paraphrase, or use direct quotes, if it's not your original idea, the source must be acknowledged. **The only exception**to this rule is information that is considered to be commonly known facts [e.g., George Washington was the first president of the United States]. Note, however, that any "commonly known fact" is culturally constructed and shaped by social and aesthetical biases. If you are in doubt about whether a fact is common knowledge or not, protect yourself from any allegations of plagiarism and cite it, or ask your professor for clarification.

Ballenger, Bruce P. The Curious Researcher: A Guide to Writing Research Papers. 7th edition. Boston, MA: Pearson, 2012; [Citing Information](http://www.lib.unc.edu/instruct/citations/). The Writing Center. University of North Carolina; [Harvard Guide to Using Sources](http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page357682). Harvard College Writing Program. Harvard University; Newton, Philip. "Academic Integrity: A Quantitative Study of Confidence and Understanding in Students at the Start of Their Higher Education." Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education 41 (2016): 482-497; [Referencing More Effectively](http://learnonline.canberra.edu.au/pluginfile.php/404052/mod_resource/content/0/Handouts/Referencing_more_effectively_handout.pdf). Academic Skills Centre. University of Canberra; [Using Sources](http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/advice-students/using-sources). Yale College Writing Center. Yale University.