**Research and working with Sources: What is Referencing?**

**Structure and Writing Style**

**Referencing your sources means systematically showing what information or ideas you are quoting or paraphrasing from another author’s work, and identifying where that information come from**. You must cite research in order to do research, but at the same time, you must delineate what are your original thoughts and ideas and what are the thoughts and ideas of others.  
  
Procedures used to reference the sources you have relied upon vary among different fields of study. However, **always speak with your professor about what writing style for citing sources should be used for the class**because it is important to fully understand the citation style to be used in your paper, and to apply it consistently. If your professor defers and tells you to "choose whatever you want, just be consistent," then choose the citation style you are most familiar with or that is appropriate to the discipline [e.g., use Chicago style if its a history class; use APA if its an education course; use MLA if it is a general writing course].

**GENERAL GUIDELINES**

**1. Should I avoid referencing other people's work?**  
No! Referencing other people's research is never an indication that your work is substandard or lacks originality if placed in the proper context. In fact, the opposite is true. If you write your paper without adequate references to previous studies, you are signaling to the reader that you are not familiar with the literature about the topic, thereby, undermining the validity of your study and your credibility as a researcher. Including references in academic writing not only defends you against allegations of plagiarism, but it is one of the most important ways to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of previous studies about the research problem. It is the intellectual packaging around which you present your study to the reader.  
  
**2. What should I do if I find that my idea has already been examined by another researcher?**  
Do not ignore another author's work because doing so will lead your readers to believe that you have either borrowed the idea or information without properly referencing it [this is plagiarism] and/or that you have failed to conduct a thorough review of the literature. You can acknowledge the other research by writing in the text of your paper something like this: [see also Smith, 2002], then citing the complete source in your list of references. Use the discovery of prior research is an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of the problem being investigated and, if applicable, as a means of delineating your analysis from those of others [e.g., the prior study in ten years old and doesn't take into account current conditions]. Reacting to prior research can include: stating how your study updates prior research, offering a new or different perspective, using a different method of data gathering, or describing a new set of recommendations, best practices, or working solutions.  
  
**3. What should I do if I want to use an adapted version of someone else's work?**  
You still must cite the original work. For example, maybe you are using a table of statistics from a journal article published in 1996 by author Smith, but you have altered or added new data to it. Reference the revised chart as: [adapted from Smith, 1996] then cite the complete source in your list of references. You can also use other terms in order to specify the exact relationship between the original source and the version you have presented, such as, "based on Smith [1996]...," or "summarized from Smith [1996]...."  Citing the original source helps the reader locate where the information was first presented and under what context it was used as well as evaluate how effectively you adapted it.  
  
**4. What should I do if several authors have published very similar information or ideas?**  
You can indicate that the idea or information can be found in the work of others by stating something similar to the following example: "Though in fact many authors have applied this theory to understanding economic relations among nations [for example, see Smith, 1989; Jones, 19991; Johnson, 1994], little attention has been given to applying the theory to examining the actions of non-governmental organizations in a globalized economy." If you only reference one author or only the most recent study, then your readers may assume that only one author has published on this topic, or, conclude that you have not reviewed the literature thoroughly. Referencing all relevant authors of prior studies gives your readers a clear idea of the breadth of analysis you conducted in preparing to study the research problem. If there has been a lot of prior research on the topic, cite the most comprehensive and recent works because they will presumably discuss and cite the older studies, but note that there has been significant scholarship devoted to the topic so the reader knows that you are aware of this.  
  
**5. What if I find exactly what I want to say in the writing of another researcher?**  
In the social sciences, the rationale in duplicating prior research is generally governed by changing circumstances or conditions that warrant a new investigation. If someone else has thoroughly investigated precisely the same research problem as you, then you likely will have to change your topic, or at the very least, review the literature to identify something new to say about the problem. However, if it is someone else's particularly succinct expression, but it fits perfectly with what you are trying to say, then you can quote it directly, referencing the source. Don't see this as a setback or discouraged by the fact that the brilliant idea or important insight that you came up with on your own has already been identified by someone else. Discovering an author who has made the same point that you have is an opportunity to add legitimacy to, as well as reinforce the significance of, the research problem you are investigating. The key is to build on that idea in new and innovative ways.

**6. Should I cite a source even if it was published long ago?**  
Obviously, any resource used in writing your paper should be cited, regardless of when the study was completed. However, in building a case for understanding prior research about your topic, it is generally true that you should focus on citing the most recently published studies because they presumably have built upon the research of older publications. This is particularly true of new or revised editions of books, unless an older edition has unique information not carried over into newer editions. When referencing prior studies, use the research problem as your guide concerning what to cite. If a study from forty years ago investigated the same research problem, it probably should be studied and included in your list of references because the research may have been a foundational or groundbreaking even if its findings are no longer relevant to current conditions or reflective of current thinking [one way to determine if a study is foundational or groundbreaking is to examine how often it has been cited in recent studies]. However, if an older study only relates to the research problem tangentially ot it has not been cited in more recent studies, then it may be more appropriate to list it under suggested readings.

Ballenger, Bruce P. *The Curious Researcher: A Guide to Writing Research Papers*. 7th edition. Boston, MA: Pearson, 2012; [Harvard Guide to Using Sources](http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page357682). Harvard College Writing Program. Harvard University; [How to Cite Other Sources in Your Paper](http://abacus.bates.edu/~ganderso/biology/resources/writing/HTWcitations.html). The Structure, Format, Content, and Style of a Journal-Style Scientific Paper. Department of Biology. Bates College; Lunsford, Andrea A. and Robert Connors;*The St. Martin's Handbook*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989; Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*. 3rd edition. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2015; [Research and Citation Resources](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/). The Writing Lab and The OWL. Purdue University; [Using Evidence](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/using_evidence.shtml). Writing Tutorial Services, Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning. Indiana University.