

Last year Natalia wrote an excellent research paper. She spent months researching — reading, analyzing, thinking, and writing. Her professor was very impressed with her paper. In fact, she was so impressed that she suggested that Natalia submit it to a journal for publication.

A few months later another student read her paper and decided to use a few ideas and words from it, but didn't realize that he needed to give Natalia credit. When Natalia found out and read his paper, she was pretty upset and took it up with the Dean of Students.

Most students know that you shouldn't quote directly from another person's work without citing them, or worse, submit an entire work as if it were your own. But did you know there are other practices that can qualify as plagiarism?

That's right. For example:

Copying verbatim a few phrases or sentences from the work of others without attribution
and...

Paraphrasing sections of another text without any reference in the body text. Just including it in your bibliography or reference list is not enough.

It doesn't matter whether you use the same ideas without using direct words, or if you use direct quotes. Either way you need to give credit to the original creator. The only time you don't need to cite something is if it is common knowledge.

Not only is it important to give the original author the credit they deserve, but it's also important to allow your reader to track down the sources you used. You do this by citing them accurately. That's why there are detailed citation styles for specific disciplines that you must use when formatting your citations.

So how should you cite something you want to use? Various disciplines publish their own guidelines of how to cite sources and format research papers.

Since there are several different options for styles, be sure to ask your professor which style they prefer for their course.

Some examples of these are: ASA (American Sociological Association), APA (American Psychological Association), The Bluebook, for Law, CMS (Chicago Manual of Style) for various subjects, and MLA (Modern Language Association) for Humanities.

These styles differ quite a bit in their details on how to format your references. Here's the same citation, formatted in three different styles.

It can be hard to remember everything you need for a particular type of citation and the good thing is you don't have to keep all these details in your head.

There are many websites that can help you put together bibliography entries and also many databases can do it automatically.

When you cite your sources properly, readers know what works you used and how you used them. And they can easily locate them. In this way you avoid

unintentionally plagiarizing the work of others. If the student who copied ideas from Natalia's paper had done this, Natalia would have received the credit she deserved.

Want to learn more?

For links to various style guides, see our guide to Citing Sources and Academic Integrity.

Also, you can download software for managing your bibliographies on our Citation Management page.

Good luck with your papers!