Writing a Scholarly Economics Paper

This brief guide will help you find sources and properly cite them in an academic paper. It offers specific instructions and examples.

**Sources**

You may certainly read nonprofessional sources like *Newsweek* or google your research question to collect background information, but these sources are not suitable for an academic paper. Do not rely on mass media sources. Avoid *Investopedia*, data aggregators, and blogs.

You are trying to have a conversation at a much higher level. You want curated, high quality sources. You need to find work published in professional, academic journals.

JSTOR is an archive that contains the full text of a select group of journals in economics and other disciplines up through about four years ago (this varies from journal to journal). It is a great place to start. You can access it from here: [libguides.depauw.edu/go.php?c=2638594](http://libguides.depauw.edu/go.php?c=2638594) (if you are on campus it will go straight to JSTOR and if off campus, you will have to login).

The references of the papers you find can lead you to other interesting papers. Once you find a single paper that addresses your research question, its bibliography is a gold mine of other papers that asked that question, or related questions.

This is called “in-text citation” and it is the modern, preferred way to cite in economics.

Google “in-text citation” to learn more, but it is simple and easy.

**Citation Style**

Citation is important and there is a specific style used by academic economists. After paraphrasing findings or explicitly quoting text, give credit by simply listing the last name of the author (use “*et al.*” when there are two or more authors) and year of publication. **Do not include the entire reference in the text of your paper or in a footnote.** You can also begin a sentence with the paper’s reference. Here is an example: “Smith (2003) finds that more schooling lowers the probability of smoking.” In the references, a full citation of the Smith (2003) article is presented. Here’s how to cite in your text:

* + One author – (Lindsey, 2012)
  + Two or more authors, subsequent in-text reference – (Lindsey et al., 2013)
  + No author attribution, use the name of the document – (*Globalization*, 2011)

**Do not use any footnotes or endnotes.**

Do not do this: Adam Smith, a famous economist, said that capitalism was amazing.

Do this: Smith (1776) said that capitalism was amazing.

*References List at the End of the Paper*

* Authors' names are inverted (last name first); give the last name and initials for all authors of a particular work.
* Reference list entries should be alphabetized by the last name of the first author of each work.
* Italicize titles of longer works such as books and journals, otherwise, use quotation marks.
* Some examples:
  + Journal article

Author, A., Author, B., & Author, C. (Year). “Title of article.” *Title of Periodical, volume number*(issue number), pages.

* + Book

Author, A. (Year of publication). *Title of work: Capital letter also for subtitle*. Location: Publisher.

* + Nonperiodical Web Document, Web Page, or Report

Author, A. & Author, B. (Date of publication). *Title of document*. Retrieved month day, year, from http://Web address.

These are the basic rules, for more, see *The Owl at Purdue:* [*owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/*](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/)

Two excellent books on writing and style are:

* *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White
* *The Gregg Reference Manual* by Sabin

**Plagiarism**

Be warned of the dangers of plagiarism. It is very easy to plagiarize someone's work unintentionally; but this fact does not make plagiarism any less serious of an offense. Make certain that you either directly quote and attribute the quote, or paraphrase the source (no more than three consecutive words alike). Remember this: In general, direct quotation should be used sparingly in an economics research paper. Repeated use of direct quotation gives the impression of laziness and is often disruptive of your own style and method of organization.

A good strategy is to make sure that you paraphrase the work when you are actually taking the notes from the source, in case you forget to do so later on. Remember that the whole point of a literature review is to present others' work—your contribution will come a bit later. It is perfectly acceptable to say something like, "In his recent book on medical malpractice, Jones (2003) contends that ..."

Here are some critical ideas about plagiarism:

1. **Definition:**

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's words as your own. These words may come from a manuscript, notes, a book, a magazine article, or a pamphlet written by someone else. You commit plagiarism when you use a sequence of words from one of these sources without acknowledging the source in your paper.

1. **A note on good academic practice:**

The ideal purpose of documenting sources and providing references is to assist the reader who wants to pursue points raised in your paper. That is, we value and hope to facilitate the free exchange and pursuit of ideas. In your paper, you might present ideas or opinions, based on your reading of certain sources, which you have made your own and which you state entirely in your own words. If you do not document these sources you may not have plagiarized in the strict sense; however, you will have failed to live up to the ideal purpose of providing documentation, you may mislead your reader about the extent of your debt to those who have gone before you, and you will have produced a paper of inferior quality.

1. **Examples:**

These examples and their evaluations are quoted verbatim from pages 111 - 112 of Nancy Hilts Deane, *Teaching with a Purpose: Instructor's Guide and Resource Book for Writing with a Purpose* (Fifth Edition, 1974).Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

**Original Material**: "The world as Rabbit knows it is filled with nothing but oppression and hurts, and this is the condition which dictates his peculiar kind of isolation; to everyone but Tothero and Mrs. Smith he is a perfect rogue. His absolute devotion to a quest for meaning dictates his absolute aloneness in a society which knows nothing of meaning." (From David Galloway, *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction*, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1966, p. 36.)

**Student version A**: In *Rabbit Run*, the hero knows the world is filled with nothing but oppression and hurts, and this knowledge results in his peculiar kind of isolation. He is a perfect rogue to everyone but Tothero and Mrs. Smith. His absolute devotion to a quest for meaning produces his absolute aloneness in a society that knows nothing of meaning.

This version constitutes plagiarism in its most deplorable form. The student has substituted a few words, and rearranged the second sentence, but retained the original phrasing. He provides no documentation whatsoever, which implies to the reader that these sentences are entirely the student’s own thought and words.

**Student version B**: The world as Rabbit sees it is filled with nothing but oppression and pain; this dictates his peculiar brand of isolation. To everyone but Tothero and Mrs. Smith, he is a virulent rogue. In a society which knows nothing about meaning, Rabbit's absolute devotion to a quest for meaning dictates his absolute aloneness.1

1 David Galloway, *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction*, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1966), p. 36.

This version is also plagiarism—once students have been warned of the fact—even though the writer documents his source. He has obviously copied almost directly from the original text, dropping and changing only a few words and reversing the order of the third sentence. His version is neither a summary nor a proper paraphrase.

**Student version C**: In describing Rabbit Angstrom's alienation, David Galloway insists that Rabbit knows a world filled with "oppression and hurts," while seeming to be a "perfect rogue" to everyone but Tothero and Mrs. Smith. Galloway argues that Rabbit's "absolute devotion to a quest for meaning dictates his absolute aloneness in a society which knows nothing of meaning."1 Such a quest finally leads Rabbit away from his family and friends and into a future of continuous searching.

1 David Galloway, *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction*, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1966), p. 36.

This version represents a satisfactory handling of the source material. The student identifies the source in the first sentence, and directly quotes key words and an important idea, using the appropriate footnote technique. The third sentence repeats the key word "quest" and contains his own summation of the theme of the novel.

Plagiarism is a violation of trust and a deceptive practice that carries extreme penalties. You should always be careful to make sure you are using your own words and properly citing your sources. Merely including a reference does not guarantee that you have not plagiarized, as shown in Student version B above.