

References and Plagiarism

Written work in this course is designed to emphasize your own analysis of events and issues. That is, the expectation is that your major effort will be to think through problems of interest and to bring to bear on them your own perception, insight, analysis, and synthesis. Thus, though you will of course need to familiarize yourself with the basic information on the subject and with the writing of others, a paper that does nothing more than report information and summarize what others have written is incomplete.

Since you will, however, need to include in your written work information and insights from other authors, and since there is continuing confusion on how to do that, it seems useful to review when and how you incorporate into your own papers the information and ideas you have drawn from others.

Regardless of whether you write short or long papers, or of whether you emphasize information collection, concept development, or analysis and synthesis, your writing will normally include three elements:

- (a) a summary and/or review of the relevant material you have read;
- (b) a critical analysis of the material you have read; and
- (c) your own thoughts, insights, and conclusions.

Like other academic authors, when you write, you will make use of the research findings, the ideas, and the conclusions of others. Thus, it is important that it be clear to readers of your work which parts of your papers you have drawn from which sources.

There are two important reasons for providing this full identification of sources. The first has to do with the development of our understanding of the problems we are exploring. Readers of your paper (for example, others in the class focusing on the same topic or country) may wish to pursue a particular topic at greater length. In that case, by providing complete references, you have directed them toward sources that may prove useful. As well, readers may disagree with your report of the facts or with conclusions your sources have drawn from their research. In that case, by providing complete references you have enabled the reader to know on which school of thought and on which authors' opinions your work relies.

The second reason has to do with learning. Offering what someone else has written as if it were your own thought means that you have not done your own thinking on the topic, and that, therefore, you have failed in the assignment. Formally, that is plagiarism.

The material in your papers will thus be of three sorts:

- (1) Some basic information or ideas you have drawn from the sources you consulted. Occasionally that will seem to you so well said that you want to reproduce it in the words of the original author. When you use the words of the original author, they must be enclosed in quotation marks, and your source must be indicated.
- (2) Some other information or ideas you have drawn from the sources you consulted. Most often, you want to present it in summary form in your own words. In that case, you do not need quotation marks (since the words are yours), but you must indicate clearly your source.

- (3) Some information or ideas will come from your own research and thinking, and those of course require neither quotation marks nor a reference to the source. It would be of little use to your reader to find:

Based on this evidence, I conclude that¹

When you indicate your sources, the references must be sufficiently complete for a reader to find, with little difficulty, the original material cited. A common form used in bibliographies is:

[books] Author's-name, Title-of-book (City: Publisher, Date published), pages.

[articles] Author's-name, "Title-of-Article," Journal Volume,Number(Date):pages.

[internet] Author's-name, Title-of-Article [or paper], Complete URL [Date consulted].

For footnotes in the body of the paper, the simplest form is:

Author's name, Short-Title, pages.

Whatever form you use for your citation of sources, you must provide complete details (for a book: Author, Title Place of Publication, Publisher, Publication Date, pages; for an article, Author, Title, Journal, Volume, Number, Date of Issue in which the article appears, pages) in order to make your reader's job as simple as possible. Since internet sites may change frequently, you should indicate both the complete address (URL) and the date on which you found the cited material.

Note that when you use material from an edited book or collection of papers, you must be sure to cite the author of the chapter or article you are actually using and not just the general editor and title. After all, if you edited the papers of your fellow students, you would not want to be blamed for all of their confusions! A common form for that is:

Chapter-Author's-Name, "Chapter-Title," in Book-Editor's-Name, editor, Title-of-Book (City: Publisher, Date), pages of chapter.

As was stressed above, the emphasis in your papers should be on your own critique and analysis, based on careful reading of the relevant materials. Normally, the parts of your papers that summarize necessary information and report research findings should be syntheses of several sources, and only infrequently will it be desirable to quote directly from a single source.

Footnotes should be used: (a) to indicate the authorship of quoted material, (b) to indicate the source for specific information that is either new and/or controversial and/or not common knowledge, and (c) to suggest relevant background, conflicting, or supplementary material.

But you must be careful not to let the report of others' findings and the summary of necessary background information preclude your own careful analysis.

Joel Samoff
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¹Myself, last Thursday, just after my bath.