



SUMMARIZING, CITATION, AND PLAGIARISM

One of the difficult challenges in summarizing, taking notes, or writing about what we have read, is to distinguish between the words and ideas of our *sources* and our *own* words and ideas. Plagiarism occurs when we fail to make this distinction, and so we write something that gives our reader the impression that it is our own work, when in fact what we have written is the work of someone else.

In the academic world, traceability of intellectual kinship is a core value. While in other realms – e.g., politics, business – people might give speeches or file reports or memos that were written largely by others without identifying whose words and ideas are whose, in academia, it is important that words and ideas be traceable to their source of origin. *Plagiarism* derives from a Latin root meaning “to kidnap”: to plagiarize is to kidnap someone's brainchild and represent it in the world as one's own.

To avoid plagiarism, it is important to develop our skills at working with sources, articulating our own ideas, and appropriately documenting what we write. Using sources appropriately involves an understanding of different citation conventions in different fields, a recognition that there are many judgment calls to be made with regard to how we will draw on our sources, and an appreciation of the complex interactions of all scholars as both readers and writers. In this effort, it is worth keeping in mind one “*always*” and one “*never*”:

- ✓ **Always.** Whenever you *write something* (in your notes, in a draft, in a final paper, etc.), always be careful to identify which words, ideas, or links between ideas are yours and which are someone else's. This means attaching a specific citation to words, phrases, or ideas that you get from your sources. Don't count on being able to remember later what came from where, and don't assume your reader can tell without your having to specify. Get in the habit of attaching “labels” onto everything you write down, *when you write it down*, indicating the source.
- ✓ **Never.** Whenever you *cut and paste* someone else's text electronically – whether from something on line into your notes, or from your notes into your paper, or between different drafts of your writing, or from an analog into a digital format – *never* do so without being sure the words are in quotation marks and a citation is attached. Whether you cut and paste from a book, article, Wikipedia, blog, or other source, *never* do so without quotation marks and a citation.

Don't hesitate to ask for consultation around any questions or judgment calls you are struggling with in your work. Consultation and guidance is available from the following resources:

- Bureau of Study Counsel
bsc.harvard.edu
- *Harvard Guide to Using Sources*
usingsources.fas.harvard.edu
- Your Teaching Fellow or Professor
- Harvard Libraries
library.harvard.edu
- Harvard College Writing Program
writingprogram.fas.harvard.edu
- Harvard Writing Center
writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu