

The honor code of Southwestern University asks students to verify that they have “acted with honesty and integrity,” but understanding the ins and outs of citation and quotation can be difficult. Here are a few tips for avoiding accidental plagiarism in your own writing. You may also want to check out the library’s infoguide on avoiding plagiarism.

1. Know what needs citing.

Luckily, this one’s pretty easy. Any time you use **words, ideas, data, images, or theories that are not your own**, you need to let your reader know who did the work of figuring (or spelling) these out, & where we can find these phrases or images, this data, or these ideas. **The one exception is common knowledge.** A good general rule of thumb is that common knowledge is both **easily verifiable** and **widely known**. The Writing Lab at Purdue suggests that if you can find a fact in at least five sources that treat it as common knowledge, and if most of your classmates know it as well, it’s probably common knowledge.¹ If you’re in doubt, it’s best to check with your professor.

2. Know the citation style that’s appropriate for your class & how to use it.

Most professors will ask that you write papers with reference to the **MLA, ASA, APA, Chicago, or Turabian** style guides. While each of these use different citation methods, none are particularly complex – they all essentially want the same information: Who made this and when? Were there editors involved & who were they? Where was it published and by whom? What type of source is this? What’s most important is that you **ask your professor** what style he or she would prefer. From there, you can find links to reliable resources through the Lib Guides at the library or under the “**Writing Resources for Students**” tab of the DEWC website.

3. Check ahead of time to make sure you know how to cite all of your sources.

Some sources may be difficult to cite, and some style guides are still catching up with the times. If you’ll be using sources like interviews, class notes, quotes from social media, film or artwork, be sure you know how to cite these before the paper is due. If you’re working from texts included in a course packet, you may want to ask your professor how he or she would prefer you cite those materials.

4. Know how to cite direct quotations in the text of your paper.

We tend to think of citations in terms of bibliography. While that’s important, what’s happening in the body of your paper can matter much more. In almost every citation style you should **credit the writer or speaker of a direct quotation either in the sentence introducing the quote or in the parenthetical citation**. Since styles vary, you should also check your style guide for how to format block quotes (generally more than three or four lines) or unusual formatting as one might find in poetry or on a website.

5. Know how to cite paraphrases & avoid patchwriting.

As with direct quotations, you should credit your source when you paraphrase, either in the sentence itself or in the parenthetical citation at the end. When you paraphrase, watch out for “**patchwriting**,” which Sarah Jamieson & Rebecca Moore Howard, authors of *The Citation Project*, define as “**Restating a phrase, clause, or one or more sentences while staying close to the language or syntax of the source.**”²

¹ Stoley, Karl, Allen Brizee, and Joshua M. Paiz. “Is It Plagiarism Yet?” *The Purdue OWL*. Purdue U Writing Lab, 13 Feb. 2013. Web. 25 Feb. 2014.

²Jamieson, Sarah, and Rebecca Moore Howard. “What is Plagiarism?” *The Citation Project*. Web. 25 Feb. 2014.

6. Make use of the resources available to you at Southwestern.

Your **professors**, your **research librarians**, and **the friendly consultants in the DEWC** are all here to help you avoid accidental plagiarism. There are several computer programs that will help you manage your notes and keep track of your sources, including **Zotero** and **Scrivener**. **Noodlebib** can help you organize your bibliography.

COMMON PROBLEM 1: Proper Paraphrasing, or, “Where does your argument begin?”

Original Source:

Medical training has traditionally emphasized pathophysiology, clinical evidence, and communication skills to prepare physicians for the numerous decisions they will help patients make. An important element missing from this training is an understanding of the behavioral underpinnings of choice.³

Problem Use:

As Verma, Razak, and Detsky (2014) write, “Medical training has traditionally emphasized pathophysiology, clinical evidence, and communication skills to prepare physicians for the numerous decisions they will help patients make” (p. 572). But because doctors’ training frequently neglects to address the way behavioral factors influence patient choice, medical schools should add additional training in the subject.

Revised Use:

COMMON PROBLEM 2: Patchwriting

Original Source:

Joan of Arc cross-dressed to do battle as a soldier and this act would lead to her death. As a 13-year-old girl she informed the Church authorities that she had heard voices calling her to fight the English. At the time, she was living with her parents in Domrémy and had lived the life of a peasant girl. Initially the local priest considered her with suspicion but she followed the instructions of her voices.⁴

Problem Use:

She dressed as a man to go to battle, an act that would directly contribute to her death. As a young girl, Joan told the priests at her Church that voices were telling her to go to war against the British. When this happened, she and her parents were living in a small town and Joan’s life was that of a peasant girl. At first, the Monsignor was suspicious of her claims, but Joan refused to ignore the instructions from her voices (Peakman).

Revised Use:

³ Verma, Amol, Fahal Razak and Allen S. Detsky. “Understanding Choice: Why Physicians Should Learn Prospect Theory.” *Journal of American Medicine* 311.6 (2014): 571-572.

⁴ Peakman, Julie. “The Two Joans’ Agendas.” *History Today* 64.2 (2014): n. pag. Web. 19 Feb. 2014.

COMMON PROBLEM 3: Overquoting/Not using proper punctuation

Original Source:

The new study measured hexabromocyclododecane, or HBCD, inside McMurdo Station and a nearby New Zealand base, and in wildlife and sediment at McMurdo Sound, where wastewater from the bases enters the ocean. The findings by Chen and his colleagues, which have not yet been published, were presented at a toxicology conference last fall.⁵

Problem Use:

Hexabromocyclododecane, a flame retardant from sofa cushions, has been found in areas as remote as Antarctica. The most recent study, by Chen and his colleagues, has not yet been published but were presented at a toxicology conference last fall. The new study measured hexabromocyclododecane, or HBCD, inside McMurdo Station and a nearby New Zealand base, and in wildlife and sediment at McMurdo Sound, where wastewater from the bases enters the ocean. This is only one source documenting the problem.

Revised Use:

COMMON PROBLEM 4: Not citing influential theories or ideas

This can be tricky, and can depend on what counts as common knowledge in the context of the paper you're writing.

⁵ Konkel, Lindsey. "Antarctic Wilds Carry as Much Chemical Flame Retardants as Urban Rivers." *Environmental Health News*. Scientific American, 12 Feb. 2014. Web. 19 Feb. 2014.