

## **Chapter 7: “Using Sources Ethically”**

Once you have selected and evaluated sources likely to help you answer your research question, you're ready to record all the valuable evidence and persuasive reasoning that can support your paper's conclusions. Even though your desk is stacked with books and your research archive overflows with printouts and photocopies, keep a sharp eye on your schedule. Almost every college paper requires more time than expected for drafting, revising, and editing.

In addition, a research paper is likely to require extra time for weaving in source materials and crediting them according to the system required by your instructor or expected in your field. This chapter ... will help you learn to recognize general conventions – widely shared expectations – for recording, identifying, and integrating material from sources ... alert you to common problems and suggest useful solutions that can help strengthen your final paper.

### **Showing Respect in Academic Writing**

Although research can be a complex, lively process, enriched by the exchange of ideas and findings, discussions of research ethics sometimes reduce that topic to one issue: plagiarism. Plagiarists intentionally present someone else's work as their own – whether they dishonestly submit as their own a paper purchased from the Web, pretend that passages copied from an article are their own writing, [or] appropriate the ideas or theories of others without identifying their sources ...

Plagiarism is viewed especially seriously in college because it shows a deep disrespect for the intellectual work of the academic world – analyzing, interpreting, creating, investigating, and assessing ideas. Depending on institutional policies and honor codes, plagiarism may have serious consequences – failing a paper, failing a course, or being dismissed from the institution. Behind these tough policies lies the critical issue of respect. Educating yourself about the standards of your institution, your instructor, and your profession (once you've successfully moved from college to the workplace) can protect you from making ethical errors that may carry heavy consequences.

### **Learning to Become a Credible Researcher**

Careful researchers acknowledge their intellectual obligations and their respect for the researchers, scholars, and writers who came before them. Careful researchers respect readers who are likely to be curious about the discoveries, reasons, and evidence marshaled by others. Finally, careful researchers respect themselves. Instead of trying to evade the intellectual responsibilities and benefits of a college education, they try to figure out the practices that will give their writing credibility with academic readers. In short, they learn how to write solid research papers from the best teacher of all – experience.

## **Looking for the Details**

Although the details about where to place a punctuation mark or how to identify the exact words of a source may seem finicky when you write your first research papers, many of these conventions are widely accepted academic practices. On the other hand, some details reflect the needs or traditions of a specific field or discipline. After all it's not surprising that astrophysicists and physical therapists and philosophers might favor different ways of crediting sources and reporting their own research findings ...

Learning the conventions of the style (or styles) you'll be expected to use during college is primarily a matter of learning what to watch for ...

At first glance, you may wonder how you'll ever remember all these details, even for the one style you are likely to use most often. The good news is that you don't have to remember all the details. In fact, all you have to do is look up what you need to know and then make sure that your final paper follows what's expected. And there's more good news – the more often you use a style, the easier it becomes. In fact, some researchers become so accustomed to their usual style that they begin to believe it's the only correct style. They may even argue about how something must be done without realizing that their view is true only within the limits of their one style.

## **Keeping Sight of the Goals**

No matter which style you use for your current paper and no matter how strange its details may seem to you, all four major styles [MLA, APA, CSE, Chicago] expect you to achieve these common objectives:

- Supply an immediate, brief reference in the text itself at the very moment you refer to a source. This brief reference – your in-text citation – instantly acknowledges [that you are using another person's words].
- Provide the essentials in this brief reference – the [last] name [and page] number necessary for a reader to locate full identification of the source later in the paper...
- Consolidate a full but efficient list that supplies all the publication details about each source at the end of the paper [Works Cited] ...

As you learn to recognize such conventions and apply them in your own papers, you, too, will begin to take them for granted. The more you take such conventions for granted, the further you'll have grown toward mastering the assumptions common in your field. In addition, from practical perspective, learning these practices is also your best protection against making mistakes that might look to others like intentional plagiarism.

## **Using Time Effectively**

If you're attending classes [and] probably working part-time ... you're no doubt short of time. And using time well is one of the most effective ways to avoid questionable research practices. If your time is short, however, don't take shortcuts. (After all, your

instructors have the same electronic resources that you do, and many campuses subscribe to antiplagiarism software.) Instead, continue to use your energy and your valuable time productively as you gather and incorporate information from your sources.

Remember that the value of every source remains potential until you successfully capture its facts, statistics, expert testimony, examples, or other information in a form that you can incorporate into your paper... In addition, you must accurately credit, both in the text of your paper and in a final list of sources, each source whose words or ideas you use...

Though these traditional methods can't be fully implemented instantaneously, their steady use can save you from a deadline crisis – and from the temptation to make a poor ethical decision that might jeopardize your goals for the future. When you use your time efficiently, add source information skillfully, and credit each source conscientiously, your research probably will accomplish its purpose: answering your research question so that your paper satisfies you and meets your readers' standards.

### **Following Accepted Practices**

No matter how you record your notes, they should achieve two crucial purposes: conservation and transfer. First, your notes conserve pertinent source material so that you can find it when you need it. Second, because your notes consolidate and miniaturize dense books, articles, and other documents, they help you transfer and credit what's relevant to your own paper.

As you begin to mine your sources for information, be sure that you understand exactly how your instructor expects you to credit sources... Even if you do not intend to plagiarize – to use another writer's words or ideas without appropriately crediting them – a paper full of sloppy or careless short-cuts can look just like a paper deliberately copied from unacknowledged sources.

Specify the source of a detail, an idea, a summary, a paraphrase, or a quotation as you record it in your notes. Transfer that acknowledgment into your first draft and every version that follows. You generally do not need to identify a source if you use what is called "common knowledge" – quotations, expressions, or information widely known and widely accepted. If you are uncertain about whether you need to cite a source, ask your instructor, or simply provide the citation.