Documenting Research

One of the main ideas of research is to study what others have published and form your own opinions.

When you quote people -- or even when you **summarize or paraphrase** information found in books, articles, or websites -- you must acknowledge the original author.
If you use someone else's words or ideas in your papers, PowerPoints, or projects without crediting them, you are committing a type of theft called plagiarism.
Plagiarism can be as obvious as turning in another person's paper or project as your own, or as subtle as simply paraphrasing sections of various works without giving credit.

Even reusing a paper that you wrote for another class is plagiarism.
It is also dishonest to copy text or images from websites or other sources and paste it into your paper without identifying the original author.

Even information from instructors’ lectures must be cited if you use their words or ideas in your papers.
How can you avoid plagiarism?
• Take clear, accurate notes about where you found specific ideas.
• Write down the complete citation information for each item you use.
• Use quotation marks when directly stating another person's words.
• Always credit original authors for their information and ideas, even if you do not copy their words exactly.
Citing

Citing is the process of giving credit to the sources you used to write your paper. Citations can be located in the text, at the end of the work in a bibliography, or both. It can be difficult to figure out what needs to be credited.
Use this rule:

• If you knew a piece of information before you started doing research, generally it is **common knowledge** and you do not need to credit it.

• You do not need to cite well-known facts, such as dates, which can be found in many encyclopedias, but not everything in encyclopedias is common knowledge.

• Information such as quotations, statistics, and ideas should always be cited in your papers.
Parts of a Citation

As you create your list of cited sources, it is helpful to know what type of information you need to write down.
Here is a citation from a periodical index with each of its important parts labeled.

Formats for citing are consistent so that other researchers may quickly identify the sources you used and easily locate them.

To find the guidelines for a particular format you will need to look in a style manual.

Your instructor will probably recommend a particular style manual such as the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA style), the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (MLA style) or the Chicago Manual of Style.
Look at these examples of citations in APA format. Please note that APA style requires that the lines are double-spaced and that the second and subsequent lines are indented.


Choosing sources that contain valid information and are appropriate for your research will take time and a critical eye.

• It is worthwhile to verify information when possible.
• This may include finding the background of an author, locating the original source of a fact, or determining the point of view of a publisher or sponsor.
• Another important method for evaluating print and online sources is to find out what others think.
• You might look for reviews of the work or ask your professor or a librarian for their opinions.
Once you locate and evaluate your sources, you will need to incorporate them into your paper.

Knowing how to properly cite information will not only help you avoid committing plagiarism, it will also help you write a better paper.
The Evans Library keeps on reserve the most current editions of recommended styles manuals such as the *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA style) and the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (MLA style).