

Incorporating sources

Getting the most out of sources without plagiarising

Most university writing tasks require you to draw on a range of academic sources to support your claims, arguments and ideas. To distinguish between **your** thoughts and words, and those of other authors, it is essential that proper acknowledgement be provided within the text, with a reference, and in full at the end of the text in a reference list or bibliography. Many students find the process of incorporating other sources into their writing, without plagiarising, difficult. This pamphlet provides tips and strategies to help you understand this process.

Using sources correctly

There are two main ways you can incorporate another author's ideas or information into your work: through direct quotation (transferring exact words) and indirect quotation (paraphrases and summaries):

In discussing the importance of teaching study skills, Jordan (1997: 8) comments that 'study skills are not something acquired instinctively'. → Direct quotation

As students do not obtain study skills automatically, it is very important to teach them these skills (Jordan, 1997). → Paraphrase

It is important to teach study skills to students (Jordan, 1997) → Summary

Note that the words taken directly from Jordan's text are enclosed in quotation marks. This is essential whenever an author's exact words are used. Even when the words are altered, however, the original source must be acknowledged. Failure to acknowledge



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external sources correctly is **plagiarism** – ‘the use of another person’s work without acknowledgement’ (University of Melbourne, 2002, para.2).

What has to be acknowledged?

1. Direct quotations

A direct quotation means using another person’s **exact** words. Acknowledging the source with a reference alone is not sufficient; you must also place the words in quotation marks (for shorter quotes) or indent paragraphs (for longer quotes).

For example:

According to Kramsch (1998:10) foreign language teachers should ‘objectivize the learner’s native discourse patterns’.

As Crozet and Liddicoat (1997:18) argue:

The aim of language teaching is not to assimilate the learner into the native speaker community but rather to encourage them to adopt a position in which they are comfortable in dealing with native speakers and are able to achieve personal and communicative goals.

2. Paraphrases of another person’s words or ideas

A paraphrase is an indirect quotation. It involves rewriting, or ‘translating’, someone else’s ideas into your own words.

The key to acceptable paraphrasing is being able to manipulate the language and grammatical features of the text so that you keep the meaning (and acknowledge the source of the ideas), while making the words your own. This requires highly developed writing skills and may be difficult at first; however, with experience and practice, your skills will improve.

For example:

Original text: With an understanding of the conceptualization and methods of application, QOL (Quality of Life) can be an important concept for occupational therapists to use in outcome measurement.

Paraphrase: Quality of Life has been described as an important outcome measure for occupational therapists, provided it is adequately conceptualized and the methods of applying it are understood (Liddle & McKenna, 2000).

Note: plagiarism often results from the misguided belief that acknowledgement of a source is only required when words are directly copied or quoted from the text. This is incorrect. When you paraphrase, you must cite the source of the ideas (as in the examples above).

Another common mistake made by students is **partial** paraphrasing – that is, changing only some of the words from the original. To paraphrase correctly, you must **change and rewrite** the original language completely, including the original sentence structure.

If you retain even short phrases or distinctive words from the original text without enclosing these words in quotation marks, it is plagiarism.

Acceptable paraphrasing:

- Accurately relays the information in the original source using your own words
- Acknowledges the source of the information
- Is incorporated in your discussion to add to or support your own ideas and argument

3. Summaries of another person’s ideas.

A summary is also an indirect quotation, but is much shorter than the original text and only includes the main points of the original author’s ideas or argument. By summarising the source material you can avoid overusing direct quotations and paraphrasing large sections of the original text. This forces you to be clear about the meaning of what you have read and to present the material in your own words.

Of course, you still need to acknowledge the source of the information, and you should add your own comments to provide analysis and interpretation of the work. To avoid plagiarism, you must cite the source **whenever** you summarise another person’s work.

For example:

Original text: With an understanding of the conceptualization and methods of application, QOL (Quality of Life) can be an important concept for occupational therapists to use in outcome measurement.

Summary: Quality of Life can be an important concept and outcome measure for occupational therapists (Liddle & McKenna, 2000).

4. Tables, figures, graphs, diagrams or images

When you copy or use information from any source, including information contained in tables, graphs, figures or diagrams, you must acknowledge the original source. This is also the case for images that you obtain. The acknowledgement is usually made within the caption above or below the table, graph, diagram, or figure.

5. Information obtained from personal communication and lectures

If you want to use information or an idea that you have obtained from a verbal discussion with someone or from your lectures, you have to acknowledge the source of the information in your work. Just because the other person’s work has not been published in print form, it does not mean that the ideas do not belong to that person. Seek advice from the lecturer, but in general, if you use another person’s ideas without acknowledgement, then you are plagiarising.

What does not have to be acknowledged?

- Your own ideas, arguments, theories, images, diagrams, graphs or research results
- Common knowledge – unless it is a direct quote from a specific source
- Facts available from various general reference books such as dictionaries or encyclopaedias (other than statistics or similar detail)

What is common knowledge?

Sometimes you do not need to acknowledge the source of your information. When a topic is part of what is assumed to be general or 'common knowledge' within your discipline, or information that is in the public domain, you usually do not have to provide a reference.

For example, statements such as: Bob Hawke was Prime Minister of Australia from 1983 to 1991, or World War I began in 1914 and ended in 1918, are generally known information so you do not need to provide a reference even though you may not have known these facts before you started your research. However, if you use the exact words of the reference source, you must place the words in quotation marks and acknowledge the source.

Common knowledge, along with your own arguments, connections, or extensions to referenced points can help you avoid filling the page with unnecessary references. However, if in doubt, be cautious and cite the source.

Further information

The Language and Learning Skills Unit has additional information on plagiarism, using sources correctly, referencing styles, integrating quotations, strategies for avoiding plagiarism, answers to frequently asked questions about plagiarism and further examples of how to acknowledge sources. Refer to:

The LLSU website: <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/lisu/resources/writing.html>

University of Melbourne referencing guide:

<http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/cite/index.html>

References

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