To Cite or Not to Cite?  
A Brief Guide

Citations give credit to sources that have contributed to your ideas. Rather than claiming your ideas are all original, it’s ethical to acknowledge the contributions others have made.

Plagiarism refers not just to a writer’s failure to acknowledge the use of another person’s words, but also failure to acknowledge the use of another’s ideas.

Plagiarism may be deliberate or accidental. Accidental plagiarism is still plagiarism. It is therefore the writer’s responsibility to understand what must be cited and how to cite properly.

You need not acknowledge:

1. **Your own material** (your observations, thoughts, compilation of facts, results of an experiment, etc., that are expressed in your words and format)

2. **Common knowledge**
   - *standard information*, including major facts of history
   - *folk literature* (stories such as fairy tales that are popularly known)
   - *commonsense observations*, or things that most people know (e.g., that inflation is most troublesome for people with low and fixed incomes)

   *If in doubt about whether a piece of information qualifies as “common knowledge,” it’s best to err on the side of caution and acknowledge the source.

You must acknowledge:

   - **other people’s material** (e.g., ideas, language, creative works)
   - **any facts or ideas that are not common knowledge or your own**

Acknowledgement is required no matter how you use the information. You must provide a citation when you are…

1. using language copied directly from your source*
2. paraphrasing (rewording and restructuring, but essentially saying the same thing as your source)
3. summarizing (condensing information from a source into your own words)

* you must also use quotation marks around any copied material (whether it’s an entire sentence or just a phrase)

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The above guidelines are condensed from *LB Brief*, 4th ed., pp. 426-433. Go there for further details.