

## AVOIDING PLAGIARISM THROUGH CITATION

Often in writing it is necessary to go to outside sources to get information about a topic. When you use such outside research material in a paper, you must remember to document it by properly citing your sources. Citing our sources lets readers of your paper know where to find your information if they need it in its original form. More importantly, it gives proper credit to the writer or writers from whom you have borrowed words and ideas. Failing to cite after presenting another writers words or ideas is known as *plagiarism*. In the United States, plagiarism is ethically unacceptable in writing. In fact, most universities—including the University of Oklahoma—consider it a form of academic dishonesty and will severely penalize students guilty of plagiarism.

**Citations**—All information taken from a source—all direct quotations, all ideas and opinions, and all precise *actual* information (for example, statistics and equations)—must be followed by a *citation*. A citation tells the reader what source provided your information. Different writing style manuals recommend different ways of citing material a common form is to put a shortened citation beginning with the name of the source’s writer in parentheses after the borrowed idea or quotation. A longer citation, including all the source’s relevant publication information, then appears in a reference list or works cited page at the end of the paper.

Original text: In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, fitted with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.

Citation in paper: “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit (Tolkien 15). Hobbit holes are not disgusting or barren. They are comfortable (15).

Citation in works cited page: Tolkien, J.R.R. The Hobbit. Ballantine: New York. 1973.

Different style manuals require different formats for citations in parentheses and at the end of a paper. Some style manuals recommend the use of footnotes or endnotes to cite outside sources instead of parentheses in the text of the paper. If you are unsure of what kind of citation to use, check with your instructor or department.

**Direct quotations, summaries, and paraphrases**—Even if you have properly cited your outside sources in your paper, you may still commit plagiarism if you do not present your sources’ information properly. To prevent a charge of plagiarism, include outside material in one of two ways: 1) as a direct quotation or 2) as a summary or paraphrase.

**Direct Quotations**—If you include an author’s exact words in your paper, you are using a *direct quotation*. Direct quotations must always appear enclosed in quotation marks or set off from the text in block quotations (see Writing Center handouts on specific writing styles—APA, MLA, etc.—for more information about converting long direct quotations into block quotations). Even if you have cited its source, failure to put a direct quotation in quotation marks or block results in plagiarism.

Original text: It was not really the right time for this riddle, but Bilbo was in a hurry. Gollum might have had some trouble guessing it, if he had asked it at another time.

Unacceptable: It was not really the right time for this riddle, but Bilbo was in a hurry (Tolkien 84).

Acceptable: “It was not really the right time for this riddle, but Bilbo was in a hurry” (Tolkien 84).

**Summaries and Paraphrases**—When you do not wish to present your outside information as a direct quotation you may provide a summary of the information. You may also choose to *paraphrase* the information—altering the wording of another writers work. In both summaries and paraphrases, it is important that you do not rely too much on the original wording or structure. Reproducing another writers prose too closely is called “half-copying”, and counts as a form of plagiarism even if you have given proper citation.

Original text: A sound, too, began to throb in his ears, a sort of bubbling like the noise of a large pot galloping on the fire, mixed with a rumble as of a gigantic tom-cat purring. This grew to the unmistakable gurgling noise of some vast animal snoring in its steep down there in the red glow in front of him.

Unacceptable half-copy: A noise, also, started to hum in his ears, a kind of bubbling like the sound of a big pot trotting on the fire, mixed with a purr of a large male cat. The noise swelled and became the unmistakable gurgle of snoring. Some vast animal was asleep down in the crimson glow before him (Tolkien 205).

Acceptable summary: He hears a strange gurgling sound that he soon realizes is the sound of a big animal snoring below (Tolkien 205).

Acceptable paraphrase: His ears start buzzing with a noise that Tolkien compares to a cauldron bolting over on a fire and a cat's purr. As it becomes louder, Bilbo soon recognizes the noise as the snore of some huge sleeping animal at the end of the passage he was staring down (Tolkien 205).

Notice that the acceptable summary and acceptable paraphrase both have some words that are the same as the original. Sometimes you will find no other way to state certain ideas other than with the same word or phrase used in the outside source (for example, no other format word exists for "snore" or "purr"). However, if your writing contains a large number of borrowed words or phrases, or if your sentence structure follows the outside source's too closely, you need to rewrite the passages or present them as direct quotations.

**Common knowledge**—There is one case in which you do not have to cite outside information. If you are using factual knowledge that is common knowledge to your paper's audience, then you do not have to provide a citation for it. What counts as common knowledge can change from audience to audience, so be careful when you are presenting a piece of information as common knowledge. For example, most people in the United States know that the colors on a stoplight are red, yellow, and green. You would not need to give a citation if you put this information in a paper.

On the other hand, only people well-acquainted with literature may know that *The Hobbit* is the introduction to *The Lord of the Rings*. If your audience is knowledgeable about literature, then you might be able to include this information without citing it. If your audience is not particularly knowledgeable about literature, then you would cite the information.

Thousands of facts are common knowledge; thousands more are not. Generally speaking, if you did not know piece of information before you read it in an outside source, then it is not likely to be common knowledge. If you are unsure whether or not something counts as common knowledge with your paper's audience, it is best to "play it safe" and cite the information.

Hacker, D. (1996). *Rules for writers, 3rd ed.* Bedford Books: Boston. Tolkien, J.R.R. (1973). *The Hobbit*