How to Cite References and Avoid Plagiarism

When you do research, you will find that you need information from other people. Often, these people are professionals who have spent time working on a topic in great detail. You can use the results of their investigations and the conclusions they draw from their data, but it is important that you give them credit for their work! Claiming someone else's work as your own is cheating. Even if you simply forgot to give them credit, it still looks like you are trying to take credit for their work, and you can still get in trouble.

Using the creative work, scientific results, or ideas of other people without a specific reference is a form of stealing. This form of stealing is called *plagiarism.* Fortunately, it is easy to not plagiarize. To avoid plagiarism, cite any sources of information, data, creative work, or ideas that you are borrowing from someone else. It is fine to borrow, but you have to be clear about when you are doing so. You must also use your own words when borrowing someone else's work. Simply copying what they have written is also considered plagiarism.

The use of references to support your research topic is a key part of writing a good paper. The more accurate your references are, the better researched your paper will be. Also, when you do research or projects in any of your classes, you must make a list of all the references you use. This is part of doing good research. If you have questions, ask your teacher about the methods he or she uses to document references.

It is common practice to use the Web to do research on school projects. The Web sites that you use in your report must be cited just as you would cite a book or an article from a journal. Your teacher can provide you with the format for citing Web resources.

Two steps are needed to ensure accurate references:

1. *Use* citations *in the text of your work.* Clearly show, or cite, the work you are using within what you have written. Citations include the author's last name and the year the work was published (see the following example).

   Your work may contain facts that are widely known in science, such as the speed of light or the mass of elements on the periodic table. These facts do not require text citations. But suppose you are researching changes in the rates of cigarette smoking among adults over the past 20 years. Then, you would cite resources in your text as follows:

   Recent data show that smoking rates are decreasing somewhat but that about one fourth (22.5 percent) of all Americans still smoke (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2004). Factors related to smoking rates include socioeconomic status (Adler, Boyce, Chesney, Folkman, & Syme, 1993; Sorenson, Barbeau, Hunt, & Emmons, 2004) and occupation (Nelson, Emont, Brackbill, Cameron, Peddicord, & Fiore, 1994). Another factor is whether one was exposed to a "quit-smoking" ad on radio, on television, or at work (CDC, 1999; Haviland et al., 2004).

2. *Include a list of references in your work.* Each of the citations must correspond to a list of references at the end of your report. Your teacher may have a preferred format. The following is a reference list for the example paragraph above. Note how you can find all of the references on the list cited in the paragraph. Correspondingly, you can find all of the citations in the paragraph in the reference list.

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