

Plagiarism: Citations vs. Common Knowledge

When writing a research paper, you must credit sources (even if you are not directly quoting them). For a complete guide to issues concerning plagiarism, visit the following IRSC library link.

<http://irsc.libguides.com/c.php?g=146543&p=962203>

However, information that is considered common knowledge does not have to be cited.

Common knowledge is information that is considered widely known or easily verified.

Examples of common knowledge

- Tallahassee is the capital of Florida.
- Water boils at 100°C or 212°F.

Examples of material that must be cited

- **Any kind of statistics**
 - It is deplorable that 14 percent of U.S. citizens are illiterate.
 - The average 2017 college graduate has \$37,172 in student loan debt.
- **Any references to studies by others**
 - Robert Cruise found that ancient Aztec calendars remain extremely accurate.
 - A USDA report cites a direct link between poverty and malnutrition.
- **Any references to material that an average person would not know**
 - North Carolina has more state troopers than any other state.
 - Dispersants utilized to clean up oil spills along the Alaska coasts were not approved for use in the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

Note: When in doubt, cite the source.

General Citation Guidelines

1. When using direct quotations, take care to use the exact wording, spelling, and punctuation of the original source and to credit the source. If you use the exact wording of a research source, you must indicate with quotation marks where the direct quote begins and ends.

Example:

According to insurance investigator Joyce Mulroney, “All of our independent researchers have discovered that texting is the primary cause of automotive mishaps among teenagers.”

2. When paraphrasing or summarizing (putting someone else’s ideas into your own words), you still must credit the original source.

Example:

Joyce Mulroney, an insurance investigator, cites studies that most automobile accidents involving teenagers are a direct result of texting while driving.

3. Even if you substitute a few words from an original quote, you must cite the original source.

Example:

One insurance investigator, Joyce Mulroney, claims that independent research indicates that texting is “the primary cause of automotive mishaps among teenagers.”