Citations and Plagiarism

Imagine this situation: You have invited some friends over for dinner. Because you did not have time to make a dessert, you stop at a local bakery and pick up a cake. After dinner, your friends compliment you on the delicious cake you made. How do you respond? Most people would give credit to the person who made the cake: “I’m glad you liked it, but I didn’t make it. I bought it at Sunshine Bakery.” By clarifying that the cake was not yours, you are rightfully giving the credit to Sunshine Bakery. The same concept holds true in writing.

When you write an essay, you should use your own words for the most part. Sometimes, however, writers want to use ideas that they have read in another piece of writing. For example, writers may want to use a quotation from a famous politician if they are writing an essay about a recent election. In this case, the writer must indicate that the idea or the words came from someone else and give credit to that writer. The action of indicating that a writer’s words are not original but rather from another source is called citing. In academic writing, it is imperative for a writer to cite all information that is not original.

If writers do not give credit for borrowed ideas or borrowed words, they make a serious error. In fact, it is academic theft, and such stealing of ideas or words cannot be tolerated at all. It is not acceptable to use even a few words from another source without citing the source—the amount of information that
you borrow is irrelevant. If you steal one sentence or one paragraph, it is still stealing. Stealing someone else's ideas or words and using them in a piece of writing as if they were the writer's original ideas is called plagiarism. In an academic setting, plagiarism is considered a very serious offense. In most schools, there are serious academic consequences for plagiarizing any work. For example, some schools require the paper to receive a score of 0 (zero). Other schools will expel the student permanently. In some instances, schools will take both of the above steps.

Does this mean then that writers cannot use other people's words or ideas? No, not at all. In fact, good writing can be strengthened further by using facts from outside sources or quotes from officials to support key points or ideas, so writers should borrow appropriate information. The key to avoiding plagiarism is to cite the source of the information.

Many students have a difficult time knowing when to use a citation, especially if they believe the information is general knowledge. For example, Hessa, a student from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is writing an essay about her country. She knows that the UAE is made up of seven emirates. Does she need to cite this information? If Hessa is writing this essay in an English-speaking country where people may not know that there are seven emirates, she needs to cite the information. If, however, the information is common knowledge in Hessa's academic community, she would not have to cite the information. In the end, it is better to cite the information than to risk being accused of plagiarism. Before turning in any piece of writing, it is helpful to mark any information that is not your original writing. For any information that you mark, you need to give credit to the person, organization, or Web site that originally wrote it by citing the sources.

Citing: Using a Direct Quotation or Paraphrasing

When you use material from another source, you have two choices: using a direct quotation or paraphrasing. If a writer uses the exact words (a direct quotation) from a source, the borrowed words must be placed in quotation marks. If a writer borrows an idea from a source but uses his or her original words to express this idea, the writer has used a method called paraphrasing. Paraphrasing does not require quotation marks because the writer is not using the exact words from the original source. However, whether a writer is using an exact quotation or a paraphrased version, the information is not original and must be cited.

Example of a Direct Quotation

Notice that this paragraph from Vocabulary Myths (Folse, 2004) contains a direct quote. When you use a direct quote, you must state the name of the author, the date of the publication, and the page number of the direct quotation.

One of the first observations that second language learners make in their new language is that they need vocabulary knowledge to function well in that language. How frustrating it is when you want to say something and are stymied because you do not know the word for a simple noun even! In spite of the obvious importance of vocabulary, most courses and curricula tend to be based on grammar or a combination of grammar and communication strategies rather than vocabulary. As a result, even after taking many courses, learners still lack sufficient vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary knowledge is critical to any communication. Wilkins (1972) summarizes the situation best with “While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (p. 111).

Example of a Longer Quotation

Notice that this paragraph from Vocabulary Myths (Folse, 2004) contains a longer direct quote. In this case, the direct quotation is set off differently than original writing.

As more and more empirical research in second language study is made available and results provide important insight into our questions about vocabulary learning and teaching, the education pendulum is swinging back toward some more “traditional” methods, including those which rely
on explicit instruction from the teacher. This in turn begs the question of what kinds of classroom activities, especially vocabulary activities, are effective for L2 learners. Carter and McCarthy (1988) conclude that

although it suffered neglect for a long time, vocabulary pedagogy has benefited in the last fifteen years or so from theoretical advances in the linguistic lexicon, from psycholinguistic investigations into the mental lexicon, from the communicative trend in teaching, which has brought the learner into focus, and from developments in computers. What is perhaps missing in all this is more knowledge about what happens in classrooms when vocabulary crops up (p. 51).

Example of a Paraphrase

Notice that this paragraph from *Vocabulary Myths* (Folse, 2004) contains a paraphrase, or summary, of a concept from a work written by Eskey in 1988. Instead of using any phrases or sentences from Eskey’s work, Folse uses a sentence in the paragraph that summarizes Eskey’s work and connects that idea to the current paragraph and audience. When you paraphrase material, you must state the name of the author and the date of the publication.

While lack of vocabulary knowledge is a problem across all skill areas, it is especially apparent in ESL reading. Eskey (1988) found that not being able to recognize the meaning of English words automatically causes students who are good readers in their native language to do excessive guesswork in the second language and that this guessing slows down the process of reading.

Bibliography

In addition to providing information on sources in places where they are used within your writing, you should also list all the works, or sources, of the words and ideas you used in the final bibliography, or list of works cited, at the end of your paper.

Citation methods vary according to academic professions and fields, so you should ask your instructor about the citation system that is required in your coursework.

Study the following example of a bibliography that lists the four works used in the preceding examples. The first, third, and fourth entries are books. The second entry is a chapter in an edited volume.

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**Bibliography**


