

7 RULES OF AVOIDING UNINTENTIONAL PLAGIARISM

The following list offers seven rules of thumb that will help you avoid unintentional plagiarism.

- 1. Provide clear attribution of outside sources.** This can be done with a parenthetical page/author citation, a “lead-in” or “signal phrase” in the front of a sentence with the name of the author and work cited, or a combination thereof. An attribution is simply a reference that may contain either the name of the author or the title of the work cited in your work, or both. Opening phrases such as *“In Texts and Contexts, author Steven Lynn explains that...”* clearly identify your source for the reader and allow you to smoothly incorporate your citation information seamlessly and appropriately into your discussion. Remember that even when you do write this kind of lead-in citation reference, you must still include the page number of your reference in parentheses directly after your quote or paraphrase if you have not provided it already in the body of your sentence or paragraph.
- 2. Identify all words and phrases taken from sources by enclosing them within quotation marks** and including the correct page reference in addition to author and title information. No amount of language imported from another source is so small to quote. If you didn’t write it, then it needs to be in quotation marks and properly cited.
- 3. Use your own words and sentence structure when you paraphrase.** Rephrasing and summarizing someone else’s speech or ideas is called a “paraphrase.” Paraphrases must be **completely in you’re your own words** – no words from the original material are to be included in your paraphrase, ever. A paraphrase should capture a specific idea from a source but must not duplicate the writer’s phrases or words.
- 4. Be certain that all summaries and paraphrases of your sources are accurate and objective.** Do not integrate your own editorial comments or critique into a cited paraphrase: you do not want to ever give your reader the impression that an author has said something that he or she did not actually write. You must always clearly distinguish your own views and ideas from those of your sources.
- 5. Follow all quotations, paraphrases, and summaries of outside sources with appropriate and complete citation information in parentheses.** This is called a “parenthetical citation” and it goes directly after a quote or paraphrase. A parenthetical citation only ever includes the last name of an author or authors, and a page number. Do not include the title of the work or the first name of the author(s). You may omit a parenthetical citation *only* when the information normally provided there has already been included in the body of your sentence or paragraph.
- 6. Include all of the sources – those quoted as well as those paraphrased – that you use in your own writing in a comprehensive list at the end of your work called a “Works Cited” list.** All source information included on this list must be complete, accurate, and correctly formatted. This includes electronic sources like websites. Use appropriate list-making guides to help you make sure your citations are correctly constructed.
- 7. Ask questions.** If you don’t know how to cite something correctly in your work, the biggest mistake you can make, and one that potentially exposes you to acts of plagiarism, is to not cite your source at all. Ask your instructor or use appropriate online MLA style help guides for in-text and works cited list references and citation. And always cite your sources, no matter what.