Acknowledging Sources in Academic Work

Overview

The Code of Academic Conduct of Newcomb-Tulane College defines plagiarism as unacknowledged or falsely acknowledged presentation of another person’s ideas, expressions, or original research as one’s own work. Such use is defined as plagiarism regardless of the intent of the student.

Students may, at times, be unsure of exactly what constitutes appropriate acknowledgement, particularly during their first years at the University, or when taking courses in disciplines outside of their major area of study. The purpose of this document is to offer several principles and rules that students should use to determine when and how to cite sources for their work.

Principles to Follow When Citing Sources

Two basic principles should be followed when composing an original product: (1) when giving facts, figures, dates or other information which are not general knowledge among educated people, refer to the source of the information either in the text itself or by means of a footnote; and,

(2) when composing material that is to be submitted as your own work, clearly acknowledge any condensation or paraphrase of another’s ideas or arguments.

Information and ideas may come from several sources; it is in the act of putting those ideas and facts together in new ways, or interpreting or analyzing them differently, that an original work is produced.

Specific Rules for Citing Sources

Several rules regarding citation of sources follow from the two principles above.

1. Cite sources for all direct quotations. There are no exceptions to this rule. All direct quotations must be clearly attributed to the original source.

2. Cite sources from which you paraphrase or summarize facts or ideas. This rule helps to avoid a common form of plagiarism: not only paraphrasing an unacknowledged source’s idea(s), but also literally adopting (“lifting”) certain specific phrases or stylistic expressions without placing quotation marks around them and explicitly acknowledging their source. When paraphrasing a source in your work, organize your summary or

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1 This section and Principles to Follow When Citing Sources are based on the introduction to Literary Honesty and Elementary Documentation (1982) Tulane University: New Orleans, Louisiana
2 This section is condensed from Sources: Their Use and Acknowledgement (1987) Dartmouth College: Hanover, New Hampshire pp. 3-6. Reprinted with permission.
paraphrase in your own distinctive manner; make it a natural part of your own argument and use your own words and sentences. Most importantly, properly credit the source of each summary or paraphrase.

3. **Cite sources for ideas or information that could be regarded as common knowledge but which you did not possess before encountering it in a particular source, or you think your reader might find unfamiliar.** This rule addresses those situations where there is no clear distinction between: (a) an idea that, while not your own, seems to be generally well-known (such as the heliocentric conception of the solar system); and (b) a well-known idea you intend to challenge or treat in a unique way or as an often misunderstood concept (such as the concept of schizophrenia). When you loosely adopt a well-known idea, you do not need to provide a formal citation for its source, although you should specify your understanding of the idea when you first use it in your work. When you make special use of a well-known idea, however, you do not need to provide a specific citation.

Usually you can differentiate between ideas that are common knowledge and those that are dependent on particular sources; nevertheless, there are cases where this distinction is troublesome. As a rule of thumb, if the material strikes you as unique or specialized, cite its source formally. If you think the material would strike your audience as unique or specialized, you should cite its source. Finally, whenever you cannot clearly decide whether or not a citation is needed based on these rules, take the safest course: assume that the material is not known to your audience and provide a source.

4. **Cite the exact source that you actually use.** If you use a secondary synthesis, summary, or compilation of research sources (such as a literature review), you should acknowledge it as your source, not the primary sources that it refers to or includes.

5. **Cite sources for graphical and other kinds of specialized or technical materials.** This rule extends the application of the preceding four rules to forms of work such as laboratory reports, musical compositions, works of art, or computer software.

**How to Cite Sources**

The preferred method of documenting sources of ideas and information varies among academic disciplines, departments, and instructors within departments. Before preparing any assignment for submission, be sure to consult with your instructor to determine exactly how he or she expects you to document the sources for your work.