
How to avoid plagiarism



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Academic and scientific texts are not just a patchwork of literature that the author has read. Rather, the author's job is to take into account the publications of others in his or her own argument – and **always to be clear about who said what**. This is not always easy, which is why you will be practicing the art of avoiding plagiarism throughout your academic career. Here are some rules of thumb to help you avoid violating the intellectual property rights of others:

- **You should cite the author(s) as soon as an idea or thought that is not your own first appears.** It is usually not enough to place the reference at the end of the paragraph. In addition to mentioning the author(s) in parentheses (*cf. Deane 2020, p. 6*), it is especially helpful to incorporate the names into your own text (*Deane highlights that...*, *Myers posits that...*). After such a reference, it is easier to relate your own thoughts to those of the author(s) (*If this is the case, then...*, *The author overlooks the fact that X contributes to Y*). To get a feel for the different options of referring to sources in a text, it is helpful to pay attention to how published authors in your field do it.
- **Every time** you use someone else's ideas, you need to refer the reader to the sources you used – **regardless of whether you quote them verbatim or paraphrase what they wrote.**
- If something is general knowledge, you do not need to cite a source for it. For example, you do not need to cite a source for the information that Angela Merkel was the first female German Chancellor. It can be difficult to determine what is considered general knowledge in your field or discipline. To be safe, it is best to **start by citing too much rather than too little**. With experience, you will find it easier to decide where to cite a source and where you do not need to. But you will have to make this decision again and again.
- **Never copy parts of a text from a source (e.g., documents on the internet) into your own text** – this increases the risk of inadvertent plagiarism. Take notes in your own words about the information in the source that is important to your own text. You may quote important passages verbatim (and put them in quotation marks), but you should do so sparingly.

Where you definitely have give a source:

- Direct/verbatim quotes, paraphrases, or summaries based on your reading
- Facts and evidence to support your argument
- Other authors' thoughts, ideas or theories, regardless of whether you agree with them

Based on:

Frank, Andrea/Haacke, Stefanie/Lahm, Swantje (2007): Schlüsselkompetenzen: Schreiben in Studium und Beruf. Stuttgart, S. 61f.