



Cracking the Code on A+ Essays

Part 3: Plagiarism and Referencing

Summarizing and paraphrasing without plagiarism

Creativity is not needed for high marks in school. This is because every single idea has already been posted online at least 100 times. There is nothing unique you need to come up with. Your job as a student is to find good information and put it in your own words to show your understanding.

I'm not saying you shouldn't try to come up with unique ideas! I'm just saying you don't need to.

Why do we summarize and paraphrase instead of quoting? Extensive quotes are a red flag - they mask a lack of understanding. In fact, many teachers/professors have strict limits on the percentage of an essay that can be direct quotes. It might be as low as 5%. The rest must be in your own words.

When summarizing, the goal is to condense the text while retaining the core ideas. A summary should always be significantly shorter than the original and should include only the key points and most important details.

Avoid paraphrasing a sentence word by word or chunk by chunk. You can do this for one sentence, but when you do it for a few sentences in a row, it's called "light plagiarism." A better method is to look away from the original text and put it in your own words as if you were explaining it to a younger person. This will help you avoid copying the sentence structure of the original.

Always cite your sources.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism means copying someone's exact wording without quotation marks or copying an idea without giving credit. To avoid plagiarism, always put direct quotes in quotation marks and provide a reference for both quoted ideas and ideas that are paraphrased.

If you copy three or more words in a row from any source, they MUST go inside quotation marks. Watch out for “light plagiarism”: this means simply rearranging words or copying the structure of the original too closely.

Plagiarism is completely unnecessary. The teacher is NOT looking for original content; the teacher wants to see that you did research and that you understood what you found.

Referencing

Referencing shows your effort in research and prevents plagiarism.

Students are under the mistaken impression that teachers are looking for original work. Nothing could be further from the truth! As you get older, you won't be writing personal narratives and unsupported opinion pieces. The purpose of writing assignments is to get students to read and remember what they read by writing it down in their own words. As a rule, if you have more references, you'll have a stronger essay. It's just a reflection of doing more research. Remember, writing is composed of three elements: content, arrangement, and delivery. Content is primary – the more you read about a topic, the more knowledgeable you will be, and your work will be more interesting because you'll know more interesting things to share.

Do you have to reference everything you look up?

No, you don't have to reference general facts or explanations. If you say the Earth revolves around the Sun or that water boils at 100C, you don't need references.

However, you do need to reference data or less commonly known facts. In university, a teaching assistant explained it like this:

- Student: “Miss, what do we need to reference?”
- Teaching assistant: “The capital of Canada is Ottawa. Everything else needs a reference.”
- Student: “But that means my two-page essay will have 20 references!”
- Teaching assistant: “Exactly!”

The reader wants to know how you know what you're talking about. You have to tell the reader where you found those facts so that the reader can check and make sure that you didn't misinterpret them or come to the wrong conclusion.

Example: A student wrote: "Since the 1950s, when chemical fertilizers became more common, population levels have doubled compared to what they would be without these fertilizers."

This is not a commonly known fact. This is something that has to be looked up. You have to tell the reader where you found it (see below for a sample reference).

How to Reference

Referencing has TWO parts. It includes a brief **in-text citation** right after the information and a corresponding **Works Cited** entry at the end of the essay.

In-text citations are placed immediately after the information or quote in your writing. The citation includes either the **author's last name** or the **title of the article in quotation marks** if there's no author. The in-text citation doesn't include all the reference information because it would clutter up your writing. If the reader wants to know more about this source, they scroll down to your Works Cited section to find the full reference.

The Works Cited page at the end of an essay lists full details for all sources used. The Works Cited section should include the following information:

- Author's last name, first name. If there is no name, the Works Cited entry will start with the article title in quotation marks, which will match the in-text citation.
- Title of the article in quotation marks
- Website name in italics
- Date of the article
- URL
- If there is no date (this is common with reference resources), include the date you accessed the resource.

Examples:

In-text citation (this goes in the text itself, right after the information you looked up):

Since the 1950s, when chemical fertilizers became more common, population levels have doubled compared to what they would be without these fertilizers (“World population with and without synthetic nitrogen fertilizers”).

Works Cited section entry (it starts with the same information to match the in-text citation):

“World population with and without synthetic nitrogen fertilizers.” *Our World in Data*, https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/world-population-with-and-without-fertilizer?tab=chart&country=~OWID_WRL. Accessed 21 Oct. 2024.

To clarify, EVERY item in the Works Cited section must have a corresponding in-text citation, and vice versa. Works Cited entries are listed in alphabetical order.