**Plagiarism in the U.S.: Why does it matter so much?**

In the U.S., scholars value original ideas above correctness. Professors create opportunities for students to practice reading, researching, and writing imperfectly so that students can gain expertise over time. In other words, students pretend to sound like an authority while gaining the knowledge necessary to become an authority, rather than memorizing other experts’ knowledge.

Read these lists. Which of these ideas best describe your educational background?

U.S. academics value:

* Originality
* Ownership of ideas
* Independent analysis/critique
* Argument
* Seeking and resolving ambiguities and dilemmas
* Reaching clear-cut solutions or persuasively explaining why none exist at this time

Other cultures’ academics may value:

* Accuracy
* Memorization of ideas explained by knowledgeable authorities
* Using others’ ideas to show respect for them
* Explanation or summarization
* Appreciation of key ideas of the masters or authorities

Now that you are at Lake Forest College, develop your own authority and protect yourself from plagiarism by learning possible warning signs. Have you found yourself thinking any of these?

* I can’t say this any better.
* I don’t want the professor to read something poorly written.
* I don’t have time to figure out what this means.
* Everyone can find this source easily online—I don’t need to cite it.
* I put the name of the source at the end of the paper—that is enough.
* I will look at this other paper on the same topic to get some ideas.
* The professor recommended this source, so I will repeat it word-for-word.

If you have, stop typing and do the following:

*Paraphrase:* Use an online thesaurus and dictionary to write the sentence in your own words. Write the author name and page number after the sentence in parentheses. See pp. 116-119 in *A Pocket Style Manual* for examples.

*Quote:* Type the sentence exactly as it appears in the source. Put quotation marks (“”) around the sentence. Write the author name and page number after the sentence in parentheses. See pp. 115-116 in *A Pocket Style Manual* for an example.

*Ask if it is common knowledge:* It is better to cite more often than you think you should. There are only two times you do not have to cite: 1) Your professor has told the class it is unnecessary to cite a source read in class, or 2) The information is “common knowledge,” which means it can be found easily online or in a major news source (E.g., People in any country can quickly and easily discover that President Barack Obama was the 44th president of the U.S., that the Amazon rainforest is in Brazil, or that the U.S. Civil Rights Movement happened in the 1950’s-60’s).

**Helpful terms for you to know:**

*MLA/APA/Chicago Style:* Three ways to write source information in your paper so that readers can find the source you used

*In-text citation:* The information at the end of a sentence in an MLA or APA style paper

*Footnote/endnote:* The number at the end of a sentence that matches a note at the bottom of the page or end of the paper in Chicago style

*Works Cited page:* The last page of an MLA style paper that alphabetically lists all of the sources used to write the paper

*References page:* The last page of an APA style paper that alphabetically lists all of the sources used to write the paper

*Bibliography page:* The last page of a Chicago style paper that alphabetically lists all of the sources used to write the paper

Here are helpful sections in *A Pocket Style Manual* by Diana Hacker:

* “Managing information; avoiding plagiarism” under “Research,” pp. 103-107
* “Avoiding plagiarism” in the MLA Papers section on pp. 113-118

Here is an online plagiarism quiz to check your understanding:

* http://abacus.bates.edu/cbb/quiz/index.html

Here is the Lake Forest College explanation of plagiarism:

* [www.lakeforest.edu/academics/resources/writingcenter/honesty.php](http://www.lakeforest.edu/academics/resources/writingcenter/honesty.php)

Here is the explanation of the Academic Honesty Judicial Board from the Lake Forest College catalog:

* https://www.lakeforest.edu/academics/catalog/policies/

Here are some Lake Forest College students’ thoughts about citing:

**How do you know if something is “common knowledge”?**

* “I feel like common knowledge is what you already know without having to look it up. It is information anyone can observe readily without having to research. For example, tsunamis hit coastlines would be common knowledge because any living person can experience or read about others experiencing this as truth. They don't need to research that it is in fact true because it's known, it's obvious. But if someone wants to know exactly HOW or WHY tsunamis form, and since not everyone (including me) knows these technical answers, then this would be information that would need to be explained and cited.”
* “Common knowledge could be described as something that is understood or automatically accepted by a certain group of people. To be sure that what you're talking about is common knowledge, you can check whether you could support it with a simple news article or whether you would need something researched like a book or scholarly journal article (in which case it would probably not be common knowledge).”

**Why is citing material worth the effort?**

* “If someone writes a paper and doesn't cite any information, I am less likely to believe the information they have included because I don't know where it came from. For all I know, the writer made it all up. Citing sources allows me to trust the information presented and gives credit to the original source. I believe it makes the paper stronger because it shows that the writer knows how to take information that is not theirs and apply it to his/her own ideas in order to support/oppose it—without stealing someone else’s idea.”
* “Citing material not only protects me from unintentionally plagiarizing and getting in trouble, but also reminds me that I, as a student, sometimes use citations in assigned readings to find sources for research papers. I guess I think of citing as a tradition that students should respect because it’s used by scholars and scientists everywhere.”

**What are your biggest citation questions/challenges as a writer?\***

* “My biggest problems tend to involve finding the balance between citing too much and citing too little -- I usually decide to cite too much, but that can take up space that should be for my analysis. I'm still working on using the right number of quotes in my writing.”
* “[My biggest questions are:] Deciding what quotes to use within a text to support my ideas the best, using correct format for citing MLA sources within the paper, deciding whether to use a whole quotation or just paraphrase it, and knowing where to put an in-text citation for several sentences from the same source.”

*\*Do you have these same questions? Ask your professor, a reference librarian, or a Writing Center tutor. They are all here to help you.*