STRAIGHT TALK
about PLAGIARISM

Working with sources is not easy. You know it. Teachers know it. They expect you to have questions about why, when, and how to cite sources. While you are learning to manage and use sources, instructors will usually help you address mistakes and avoid plagiarism that's obviously accidental.

Teachers are not so understanding if you deliberately plagiarize. It's wrong to turn in someone else's work as your own, to pass off parts of others' work as your own, and to deliberately fake sources, no matter how you rationalize these acts. The penalties for deliberate plagiarism are justifiably severe and uncompromising.

So plan ahead, no matter how busy you are. Ask for help when you need it, and don't cheat. Too much is at stake for you not to do your own work.

Honesty matters.

Academic research and writing depend on writers being ethical participants in an ongoing conversation about ideas. Citation styles, developed by communities of writers, not only allow writers to give credit for others' work, but they also help readers find and learn from other sources.

Citing sources, then, is a powerful tool in academic writing. Citing lets you introduce ideas to analyze, to disagree with, or to use as evidence. You might cite sources to establish the context for your own idea, to provide an overview of opinion or a range of approaches, or to explain what others have learned or thought about your topic. When you use citations in these ways you are building your own credibility and demonstrating that you understand the issues involved.

If you claim someone's work to be your own—intentionally or not—you are violating a fundamental principle of the academic community: Credit for ideas and words must be given where it's due.

Your teachers are savvy.

Teachers know that some students cheat. They also know how to catch cheaters. It's just as easy for instructors to find the original source of a paper plagiarized from the Web or an online database as it is for a dishonest student to plagiarize. Some instructors use search services and software that can scan a student paper, search the Web, and then create a report that shows where text in student writing matches text from a source on the Web.

At many schools, instructors don't even need the original source to charge a student with plagiarism. If a student lacks drafts, can't answer questions about the essay, or the writing differs radically from prior work, then an instructor may have enough information to make a plagiarism charge stand.
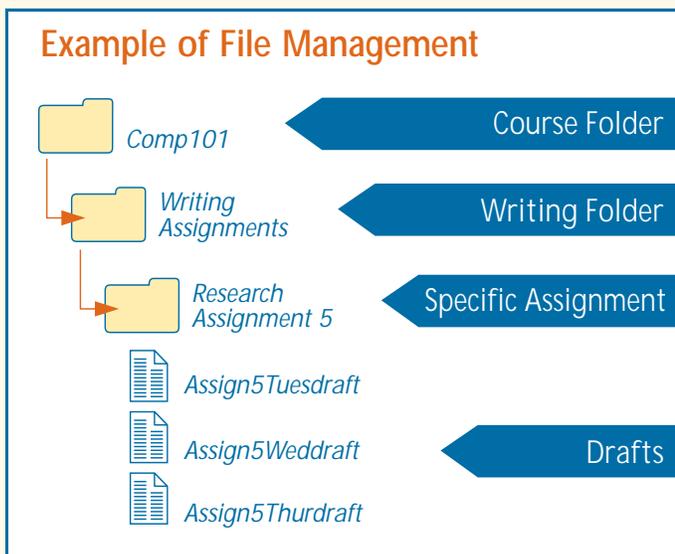
Common Citation Styles

Name of the style	Community that developed it	Disciplines that use it
MLA	Modern Language Association	English and some humanities
APA	American Psychological Association	Psychology and other social sciences
Chicago **or CMS**	University of Chicago Press	History and some humanities
CBE	Council of Science Editors (formerly the Council of Biology Editors)	Biological and earth sciences

You can avoid plagiarism.

1. **Learn about plagiarism and plan ahead.** Read the sections in your course syllabi, your school's student handbook, and textbooks that define plagiarism and give advice about managing and documenting sources. Make sure you know how to quote, paraphrase, and summarize sources before you begin to write. And don't be embarrassed to ask questions along the way.

2. **Save your work in different stages.** Instead of working in one computer file as you write and revise, save and label different drafts as separate files. You can set up a system of folders to help keep your files organized.

- Create a folder with the name of your course.

- Within your course folder, create a folder named *Writing Assignments*.

- Within your *Writing Assignments* folder, create a new folder for each assignment. Save all writing for the assignment in this folder.

- Whenever you work on a draft, use the "Save As" feature under "File" to save a new version of your document with a new name: *Assign5Tuesdraft, Assign5Weddraft, Assign5Fridraft*.

Example of File Management

Comp101	**Course Folder**
Writing Assignments	**Writing Folder**
Research Assignment 5	**Specific Assignment**
Assign5Tuesdraft	
Assign5Weddraft	**Drafts**
Assign5Thurdraft	

3. **Take notes as you work.** Instead of just writing down (or copying and pasting) quotes, read actively: Summarize main points, write questions, and jot down ideas for other sources or ideas to look up.

4. **Keep track of sources as you use them.** If you cut and paste a passage from a source into a draft, use a system that will help you distinguish the source's language from your own. For example, change the source text to bold or a different color so that the source's words will be easier to distinguish.

5. **Create a research portfolio.** In addition to saving your drafts in stages (see suggestion 2), you should also keep a research portfolio to help you manage your project and to provide an accurate record of your work. A portfolio should include:

- ✓ **A copy of every source you use**, including photocopies of print articles and key passages from books. If you use online sources, print them out or save them on disk. E-mail yourself copies of articles from databases.

- ✓ **Your notes** on both your print and online sources.

- ✓ **Your working bibliography**. As a rule, immediately record bibliographic information for every source you collect. A Web page may not exist later, and a library book could be checked out by someone else.

- ✓ **Annotations for your sources**. For each source, write a summary of the main points and key ideas. Some instructors may require you to include annotations with your final bibliography.

Ask for help with your research and writing.

Ask your instructor if your school has a writing center. Tutors there will be willing to help you at almost any point in your process. Your library or its Web site may also provide resources that can help you find and document sources.

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