

Research and Documentation General Guidelines

What is documentation?

Documentation (sometimes also referred to as “citation”) is the method you choose to give credit to the source of any borrowed idea, fact, statistic, quote, research, clever remark, or original observation that you use in your paper.

Documenting sources gives the reader security in knowing that the information you are presenting is factual and reliable.

Using any of this information without giving credit to the original writer is a crime called **plagiarism**. It is stealing and can be grounds for expulsion at most colleges and universities; therefore, it is very important to learn how to document accurately.

Which documentation format should you use?

The two most common formats are *MLA (Modern Language Association?)* and *APA (American Psychology Association?)*. Your instructor will specify which format you are to use for each individual class. MLA is typically used in language arts disciplines, and APA is typically used in social and medical sciences. There are reference handbooks detailing proper style for the various documentation formats. These books are available in libraries, bookstores, at the Writing Center, and even online. Please consult a handbook or the web for complete instruction on the different types of formats.

Whatever format you choose, documentation is a two-step process that uses internal (or parenthetical) citations and a bibliography (also known as the “Works Cited” or “References” page.)

What is a reliable source of information?

Books, text books, encyclopedias, academic journals, and other respected periodicals should comprise the bulk of your research sources. The Internet can be a good source of information as well, but it is not always factual or accurate. It is often difficult to validate the information or the integrity of the author (if the author is even listed in the information!). Use the Internet sparingly and carefully for research.

How do I conduct research?

When beginning your research, be sure to record the information about each source, such as title of the article or book, the name or names of the authors, editor, date of publication, the publishing house and its city location. Also, be sure to list the page numbers used from each particular source. If using sources from the Internet, be sure to also record the search engine used and the web address.