



School of NURSING

To cite or not to cite: That is the question.

In academic writing, you are going to be using ideas from others in order to build your arguments, tell your stories, and provide evidence for your ideas. Science is a team sport. We need to credit data, theories, ideas, and the intellectual or research work of others to put your contribution in context and cite ideas that have influenced you. Frequently, we do this through paraphrasing (preferred) or directly quoting the work to which we are referring.

The amount of works you cite depends on the purpose of your paper. Generally, you want to avoid both undercitation (which can lead to accusations of plagiarism) and overcitation (which can be unnecessarily distracting). Learning what to cite and not to cite is a bit of an art, but can be improved with practice and careful consideration. The best advice though, is when in doubt, CITE.

What we DON'T typically cite

- Your interpretation of the themes and ideas you are sharing, your linking thoughts between paragraphs or conclusions. Be sure your voice as an author is not lost in your writing because you are completely relying on the words and ideas of others.
- Common knowledge: In the broadest sense, common knowledge refers to information that the average, educated reader would accept as reliable without having to look it up. However, what may be common in one culture, nation, academic community, or peer group, may not be common knowledge in another. Think about who is reading what you write.

What we DO cite

- Direct quotes of the words of others.
- Paraphrases of research results, conclusions, additional questions, rephrases of other researchers' work.
- Data or data sets (statistics, measurements, exact days and times, sizes, etc.).
- Classroom materials (lectures, slides, instructor-provided notes).
- Personal communications (unrecoverable sources) are cited in the text but not the references page.
- As much as possible, cite primary sources (cite secondary sources—works cited in other works—sparingly!).
- Long passages of texts, reprints of tables or figures, images from the internet, commercially copyrighted test items.

Check **Chapter 8 of your APA manual** for more information about the appropriate level of citations, avoiding plagiarism, works that require a special approach, how to cite multiple works by the same author, and other topics.

For more tips, tricks, and help with what you cite and what you don't, request a consultation with the writing coaches at the SON Office of Learning & Writing Support (www.ohsu.edu/school-of-nursing/learning-writing-support/request-consultation).

Some materials in this handout adapted December, 2020 from [MIT's What is Common Knowledge](#)