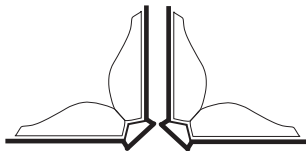Going to the

Source:

A Guide to
Academic Integrity and Attribution
at Vassar College

This guide may help you in the following and similar situations:

- you're new to college-level work

- a professor asks you to assess or join a scholarly conversation and you don't know how to do so

- you're consumed with anxiety that a professor will not think your work is original

- you're not sure how to quote or summarize a source

- you have a paper due tomorrow but haven't started it because you are overwhelmed with a personal crisis, so you're tempted to cut and paste from the Internet

- a classmate asks to borrow your problem set "just to double check my own work," and you aren't sure what to do

- you've been called before the Academic Panel for plagiarism and don't know what that means or what the implications are

This guide does not provide detailed instructions on citation styles in different fields. As noted in Part V, disciplinary forms vary; more information is available at http://libguides.vassar.edu/citingsources, which provides links to important handbooks and style manuals, both online and in print, as well as additional information about citation standards.

None of this can substitute for conversation with your professors. Their job is to help you learn and answer your questions. When in doubt, ASK!

– Co-authors

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March 2016

Table of Contents

I.

Why we all have intellectual debts, and how to acknowledge them

Students arrive at Vassar with varied levels of knowledge about citation forms and methods. Whatever understanding of these matters you bring to campus, once you begin your studies here you are entering an intellectual community—at Vassar and beyond—governed by rules about proper attribution. As a student, you will conduct research and contribute to ongoing scholarly conversations. This requires you to read and observe carefully so you understand other people's ideas, while also learning to trust your own judgments.

For students, the invitation to develop original arguments may cause anxiety. "How," you may wonder, "will I think of something no one else has thought before?" Don't panic. *Nobody's* ideas are utterly original. We all depend on others' insights to come up with our own. As one Vassar professor puts it, "Most original ideas stand on a foundation of received thinking which ought, as far as possible, to be acknowledged."[1]

Academic discussions can be exciting, passionate, inspiring—and daunting, especially when you first participate. Literary theorist Kenneth Burke uses the metaphor of a party to describe how it may feel to join such a conversation:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense . . . . The hour grows late [and] you depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.[2]

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[1] Robert DeMaria, Professor of English, in the earlier citation guide, *Originality and Attribution: A Guide for Student Writers at Vassar College*, 5. The last edition of that text, revised by Dean of Studies Sandy Thompson in 2003, is available in Special Collections and Archives, Vassar College Library. The co-authors of *Going to the Source* wish to thank professors Robert DeMaria, Joanne Long, Benjamin Lotto, James H. Merrell, Peter Antelyes, and Susan Zlotnick, as well as students Logan Hill '16 and members of the VSA Academic Affairs Committee; Hannah Reynolds '16 and members of the History Majors Committee; students in History 161, spring 2016; and faculty who participated in the spring 2016 "Talking about Teaching" workshops. All helped make this a far better guide. Any remaining errors are the authors' responsibility.

[2] Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (Baton Rouge, LA: University of Louisiana Press, 1941), 110-111.

When you decide to speak up in such a conversation, the success of your contribution depends on how well you understand what others have said and how effectively you present your thoughts so that others may respond to you.

Whenever the ideas of other people influence your own you must say so, because:

1. Identifying sources allows others to retrace your steps and decide whether or not they agree with your conclusions. (Since you'll also need to retrace *others'* steps to assess their arguments, you'll find this system handy.)

2. It's unethical to claim someone else's work as your own or hide their influence on your thinking. These are forms of theft. In some realms (such as popular music), practices such as "sampling" are common, but scholars don't borrow in this way. In the academic world, any unattributed "sampling" of ideas or words is decidedly theft. *Even if you did not intend to plagiarize*, you are responsible for what you took without acknowledgement.

When you quote a source directly, place the citation at the end of the sentence with the quotation in it. If your summary or indirect borrowing from a source extends for two or more sentences in your own paper, make sure you cite at the end, to cover *everything* you have borrowed. For examples, see the footnotes in this guide.

II.

How to approach reading, thinking, writing, and citing as integrated activities

When you conduct research for a project, write about what you find, and reference your sources, *you should not necessarily expect to work in that order*. From the beginning, active reading may entail writing in the margins of a text in order to carry on a dialogue with the author. This is your entry into the conversation, the point at which your writing process begins! You might use the margins to summarize, pose questions, concede a point, or propose a counter-argument. Whenever you highlight or underline something, write in the margins why you've called attention to that passage. Is it a major argumentative claim? A significant piece of substantiating evidence? An opposing view?[3]

Early in a project you may also want to try other forms of informal writing: journal entries, brief analyses of specific pieces of evidence, or partial drafts. As many scholars have noted, "writing leads to thinking" as much as the other way around. As you draft you must keep track of your debts to others.[4]

Citing sources, then, is not something you do after you finish writing an essay, research paper, or lab report. Citation and attribution are integral to all stages of learning and thinking about a question. One of the best guards against plagiarism is planning ahead. Allow yourself time for active reading and note-taking, drafting, reflecting, revising, rechecking sources, and receiving feedback.

When taking notes, be sure to put quotation marks around any words that are not your own, and record the source and page number of any ideas you encounter, so you can retrace your steps. **A frequent cause of accidental plagiarism is sloppy note-taking, in which quotations and close paraphrases from another author are not clearly marked.** As a consequence, you can end up borrowing ideas without remembering where they came from.

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[3] John C. Bean suggests this active reading strategy in *Engaging Ideas*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 163, 170.

[4] Lynn Hunt, "How Writing Leads to Thinking," *Perspectives on History*, February 2010, https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/february-2010/how-writing-leads-to-thinking, accessed 22 Nov. 2015. Note-taking in your own texts is encouraged, but note-taking in Library books is prohibited. *Vassar College Student Handbook, 2015/16*, p. 131: "The unauthorized removal, destruction, defacement of, or tampering with Library material of any kind is an infringement of the rights of others and, for that reason, a violation of academic integrity."

In your notes, enclose direct quotes in quotation marks. Some students keep all quotations in a different ink or font color until the final draft. Cutting and pasting from electronic sources is a risky practice: by doing so, you may acquire blocks of information that you haven't read or digested fully, and you may later go back and forget that a particular passage came from another author.

One kind of citation refers to an object of study: a poem, painting, symphony, historical document, or body of scientific data. Another type refers to what others have said about that object of study. Both forms are essential. You can cite *anything*: a Tweet, podcast, blog, cartoon, scene from a movie, photograph in a scrapbook, or letter in a box in an archive. You just need to acknowledge your debt in the appropriate form for the discipline in which you're working (see more on this below). Forms vary, and you should follow the instructions given for each specific class.

By citing something, you make a judgement about its effectiveness as a piece of evidence. If you're unsure about the value of a website, blog post, or any other source, ask your professor. As a reader, pay attention to the diverse forms citations can take. As a writer, *when in doubt, cite*.

III.

Quoting, summarizing, and paraphrasing sources: a quick guide

You may borrow words and ideas through **direct quotation, summary,** or **paraphrase**. To provide examples of these three basic ways of borrowing other people's ideas, we'll start with a familiar text. Note that the text below is a **block quote**: because it's more than three lines long (some disciplines use a standard of 40 words or longer), indentation is used instead of quotation marks.

> Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.[5]

Direct quotation is most effective when you need to borrow someone's succinct or pithy idea, or when you want readers to attend to the vocabulary, tone, and voice of the original. Here are two among many ways you could directly quote Abraham Lincoln's words:

• The United States was "conceived in Liberty," Lincoln claimed; "the proposition that all men are created equal" was its key founding principle.[6]

• Lincoln argued, "our fathers brought forth . . . a new nation, [based on] . . . the proposition that "all men are created equal."[7]

   Whenever you borrow three or more words in a row, put them in quotation marks. Note, in the second example above, how you can alter a quotation if you use brackets and ellipses to indicate that you have done so.

   Original one- or two-word concepts also need citation but may be placed in *italics* rather than quotation marks. Some terms–such as Svetlana Boym's *reflective nostalgia* or Joseph Nye's *soft power*–retain close

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[5] Abraham Lincoln, "Address at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, November 19, 1863," *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1859-1865*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), 536.

[6] Lincoln, "Address at Gettysburg," 536. This is an example of the short form for subsequent references, after a full first citation like the one in note 5, above. Depending on circumstances you may also choose to mark subsequent citations with *Ibid.* and *op cit.*, if you have learned how, but these can be confusing; check with your professor on whether to use them.

[7] Lincoln, "Address at Gettysburg," 536.

association with their originators.[8] Others, such as *global warming*, may have come into general usage and no longer need citation, though it is still wise to pay attention to whose definition of such a term you are using. When in doubt, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, available online as a database in the Vassar Library, may provide clues.[9]

The act of quoting a source does not by itself prove your argument. Frame each quotation, introducing it as a piece of evidence and explaining how it supports your analysis. Be careful about long block quotations: they can be valuable, but using too many of them may suggest that you need to develop your own analysis more.

Summary works best when you need to condense or synthesize. Here is one way you might summarize part or all of Lincoln's words:

> Lincoln asserted that liberty and equality are our nation's founding principles.[10]

You may also summarize multiple points of view, as in this example:

> How can anyone express the full essence of the Gettysburg Address, when scholars have variously traced its origins and inspirations . . . to everything from classical oratory (Nicholas Cole) to native democratic ideals (Sean Wilentz) . . . to the unavoidable pall of wartime death and suffering (Chandra Manning, Mark Schwantz)?[11]

A summary may look different in some disciplines: see Part IV, below.

Paraphrase is a restatement of another person's idea, argument, or conclusion in your own words. This can be tricky to accomplish without plagiarism. When done correctly, a paraphrase recontextualizes the original idea; you can't just change a few vocabulary choices while

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[8] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

[9] Many sources, for example, credit geochemist Wallace S. Broecker with inventing the term *global warming* in 1975, but the *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies uses of the term as early as 1952. Wallace S. Broecker, "Climatic Change: Are We on the Brink of a Pronounced Global Warming?" *Science*, New Series, Vol. 189, No. 4201 (Aug. 8, 1975), 460-463; "global warming, n." *OED* Online. Accessed 12 December 2015, Oxford University Press.

[10] Lincoln, "Address at Gettysburg," 536.

[11] Harold Holzer, "Introduction," in *The Gettysburg Address*, ed. Sean Conant (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). In this quotation Holzer summarizes four essays in the same volume: Nicholas P. Cole, "Classical Democracy and the Gettysburg Address," 3-23; Sean Wilentz, "Democracy at Gettysburg," 51-71; Chandra Manning, "Shared Suffering and the Way to Gettysburg," 126-146; Mark S. Schantz, "Death and the Gettysburg Address," 107-125.

copying the thread of someone's argument. Here are two examples of paraphrases that are TOO CLOSE to the original:

> The United States, according to Lincoln, was committed to the proposition that all men are created equal.[12]

> Eighty-seven years ago the nation's founders created the United States, basing its new government on the principle of liberty and the idea that all humans are equal.[13]

The second example uses almost no direct quotations from the original but nonetheless mimics its sequence of ideas. For this reason, many humanities and social science instructors may advise you to avoid paraphrase: direct quotation or summary is safer.

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[12] Lincoln, "Address at Gettysburg," 536.
[13] Lincoln, "Address at Gettysburg," 536.

IV.

Quoting and paraphrasing: some differences in the natural and social sciences

Writers in the natural sciences and some social sciences rarely use direct quotations. Instead, they distill or paraphrase the ideas of previous researchers on the topic by using relatively short summary statements. They do so because these disciplines place a premium on accurately representing data and results of prior research, rather than on specific wording. This type of writing may use elements of summary and paraphrase, sometimes borrowing *a few words* or technical terms from the researcher. Here is an example of an excerpt from a scientific research paper:

> Sounds emitted during the coffee roasting process were measured and analyzed, including the sounds of first crack and second crack, and the background noise produced by the rotating drum and by the circulating fan. Three acoustical characteristics of the process were found that could be used to form an automated acoustical roast monitoring technique: first crack is louder than second crack (by 15% in peak acoustic pressure), first crack is significantly lower in frequency than second crack (by a factor of nearly 19), and second crack events proceed at a higher rate (by a factor of about 5) than first crack events.[14]

A science writer's possible summary statement for this excerpt could be:

> In one previous study, Wilson identified three potential acoustic characteristics that could be used in automatically monitoring the coffee roasting process: bean crack loudness, bean crack frequency content, and bean crack rate (Wilson 2014).

The rules of plagiarism still apply: though you may paraphrase or use language very close to that of the original text, you must be careful not to borrow too much of the original wording, and of course you must acknowledge the source.

Most citations enable readers to retrace your steps, but even if that's not possible—for example, if you're intellectually indebted to a private conversation–you should still cite the source.[15] If you find marginal

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[14] Wilson PS. Coffee Roasting Acoustics. J. of the Acoust. Soc. of Am. 2014; 135 (6): EL265-EL269. This footnote is in the citation form specified by the Council of Science Editors.

[15] A conversation with Professor of History James Merrell helped clarify this paragraph. For more on the many uses of citation see Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1997).

notes in a used or borrowed book and those influence your thinking, you should cite them like any other source. Such a citation can look like this: "My ideas were influenced by anonymous marginal notes in my copy of Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, ed. and transl. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992), pp. 86-91." You may cite a class lecture like this: "Professor Jane Jones, lecture in Chemistry 101, October 2, 2016."

Unless a professor tells you otherwise, never copy solution sets, homework, or test answers and submit them as your own work, even if you find these circulating anonymously.

V.

Differences in citation form by academic field

Regardless of discipline, all scholarly citation systems consist of two parts:

1. Citations made within your text: footnotes, endnotes, or parenthetical citations
2. A reference list or bibliography at the end of your paper, listing all the sources you consulted, organized alphabetically by the author's (or first author's) last name

Various fields, however, use different forms and styles for citations and references. It's always best to check with your professor regarding the rules of the field in which you are working. It may also be helpful to find an article from a top journal in the field and use it as a model for your citation style and reference formatting.

In general, your professors care much more about your acknowledgement of sources than about whether you italicize or put a period or comma in the right place. Nonetheless, strive to get the form correct. Many disciplines have reference works, often called "style manuals," for authors to use. They contain detailed information about how to cite specific types of sources. Examples include the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, published by the Modern Language Association and used in English and other literary disciplines; the *ACS Style Guide* of the American Chemical Society; the American Psychological Association's *Publication Manual*; *Kate Turabian's Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*; and *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

The Vassar Research Librarians maintain a webpage with information on style guides in many fields and other pertinent information on citing sources. The address is:

http://libguides.vassar.edu/citingsources

VI.

Citing electronic sources

Electronic sources make it more challenging to assess authors and arguments. In print, the difference between a copy of *People* magazine and a peer-reviewed scholarly book is fairly easy to tell, but online the difference may be more difficult to figure out. For example, a digital reproduction of Leonard Bernstein's annotated copy of *Romeo and Juliet* is available as part of the Library of Congress online exhibit "*West Side Story*: Birth of a Classic."[16] This is a wonderful source to use and cite. If, on the contrary, you read and borrow ideas from reviews on a site such as *moviefone.com*, your professor is unlikely to be impressed (unless you are writing about public responses to a film and the instructor agrees that you can use this type of source). Therefore, when using Internet resources, pay particular attention to these questions: *Who wrote this? What is their agenda or goal? Has any institution or body reviewed or vetted the information?*

The Internet provides immense bodies of reference material that are anonymously or collectively authored. *Wikipedia*, for example, contains a long entry on the "Communist Party of China."[17] You may cite such a work (we just did), and you should absolutely cite it if you're using it as a source of information. But it's better to treat such entries as an informal starting point for more scholarly research on the topic. As with any encyclopedia, print or digital, *Wikipedia* is a place to begin your inquiry; it provides an orientation to a topic so you can investigate further using more substantive sources. (*Wikipedia* entries often include a bibliography with additional sources to consult, though the quality of the references varies.)

You can't cut and paste from *Wikipedia* or a similar source and present it as your own work, even if no author is listed. The same is true for a graph, figure, or batch of computer code. The ideas you are taking aren't yours. You also can't use an online program such as Google-Translate to translate a passage from another language and submit it as your own work. It isn't.

Most disciplinary style guides (see Part V above) provide instructions of how to cite Internet resources.

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[16] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. George Kittredge (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1940), Leonard Bernstein Collection, Music Division Library of Congress, "West Side Story: Birth of a Classic," online exhibition, Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/exhibits/westsidestory/westsidestory-exhibit.html, accessed 22 Nov. 2015.

[17] "Communist Party of China," en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_of_China, accessed 21 November 2015.

VII.

Making sure you give credit to the right people

Whether using electronic or print sources, be careful to attribute ideas to their originators. Imagine, for example, that you find the following quotation on a scholarly blog:

> To John Butler Yeats, 14 March 1916. Yeats has been "turning over a book of Japanese paintings" and remarks of their "delight in form" and "ordering of natural objects," without resort to "imitation." [18]

The author of this blog has done a great deal of work for you. You can't cite the document simply as "W.B. Yeats, letter to John Butler Yeats, 14 March 1916," as if you had consulted the original letter. Instead, show the source of your information and indicate that you're borrowing the editor's work, as shown in the footnote below. The same is true of a source cited in a print book or any other source.

VIII.

Making sure you do not plagiarize in collaborative work

When instructors ask you to work with classmates, listen carefully to their directions. Don't assume that because you worked with other students on a group project, it's also acceptable to share notes or finish a homework assignment together. **Many plagiarism cases emerge from situations in which students allow others access to their work.** If you lend your essay, report, or problem set to a classmate, you may still be responsible to the Academic Panel for contributing to plagiarism, even if you are unaware of what the borrower did. Collaborative work–from group projects to peer-review workshops–will enrich your studies at Vassar. However, you should never work with others on an assignment unless you have permission to do so and a clear understanding of what your instructor does and does not allow.

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[18] W.B. Yeats, letter to John Butler Yeats, 14 March 1916, quoted in David Ewick, "Japonisme, Orientalism, Modernism: A Bibliography of Japan in English-Language Verse of the Early 20th Century," 2003. themargins.net/bib/B/BL/bl048.html, accessed November 21, 2015.

IX.

How to know when you *don't* need to cite something

Specific facts that never change–such as the law of thermodynamics, an equation, or the date of an event–do not need citation. You could state in a paper, without citation, that George Lucas directed *Star Wars*, that the film appeared in 1977, and that it was highly successful. You do not need a citation for Lucas' full name (George Walton Lucas, Jr.), birthdate (May 14, 1944), or place of birth (Modesto, California). If, however, you draw on an author's argument about *why* the original *Star Wars* movie was so popular–its themes, its use of special effects, or the political or cultural moment in which it appeared–then a citation is needed. Likewise, an estimate of the current value of Lucas' fortune is debatable information, since estimates could vary, so you need to cite a source.[19]

A citation can be technically correct but intellectually dishonest. Consider the following use of our earlier quotation from Kenneth Burke: Scholarly debates get "too heated . . . and no one present is qualified."[20] This is not a case of plagiarism; the quotation and citation are correct. But anyone who reads the original passage will see that Burke's ideas are being grossly misconstrued.

You could more accurately represent Burke's point with longer direct quotations:

> According to Burke, the debate becomes "too heated for [participants] to pause and tell you . . . what it is about," and since the conversation began long ago, "no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before."[21]

Ellipses (. . .) can hide crucial information, so when using them be careful not to change the meaning of the source. You must represent others' views as accurately as possible and you should not misstate them to advance your own point.

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[19] This example is drawn from Matt Ashare, "Understanding and Preventing Plagiarism: Strategies and Resources for Teachers and Students," Accredited Schools Online, www.accreditedschoolsonline.org/resources/preventing-plagiarism/, accessed 21 November 2015.

[20] Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 110-111.

[21] Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 110-111.

X.

What happens at Vassar if a student is accused of plagiarism

In suspected cases of plagiarism, the instructor prepares a written statement of complaint to the Academic Panel. The Panel is chaired by the Dean of Studies and includes elected faculty members and student representatives from the VSA Judicial Board. Defendants are informed of the charges and must attend a hearing and answer questions from Panel members. Penalties may include invalidation of the work, a grade of F for the course, loss of credit for the course, or a recommendation to the President for suspension or expulsion. **Many cases of inadvertent plagiarism come before the Panel**. If you borrow without acknowledging the source you are responsible for your action, whether or not you intended to plagiarize.[22]

XI.

How to avoid a trip to the Academic Panel by using available resources

When you encounter difficulties–which are an expected part of your college education–Vassar faculty and administrators are here to listen and help. First, get in touch with your professor and ask for advice. If you feel comfortable, feel free to share problems or experiences beyond the class that may be affecting your academic work. In the long run it's much worse to plagiarize than it is to explain your predicament and ask what to do.

You can also make an appointment with a **research librarian**, whose job is to help you locate and use research resources. See the Library home page for the "Ask a Librarian" feature; depending on the day and time, you may text, call, email, or write to get help. You can also make an appointment at the **Writing Center** for advice on starting or improving a paper.

Your **pre-major or major adviser** can serve as a helpful resource. It's also the job of the friendly folks in the **Dean of Studies** office to help with any academic or personal troubles you may encounter. You can always seek out your **class adviser** there, whose job is to listen, help you find solutions, and refer you to campus resources. You may ask for this meeting to be confidential.

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[22] *Vassar Student Handbook,* available through the Dean of the College website Vassar College,
deanofthecollege.vassar.edu/documents/student-handbook/VassarStudentHandbook.pdf

XII.

- No one's ideas are completely original. We depend on others' insights to come up with our own.

- Citing sources is essential to developing new knowledge, because it allows researchers to retrace one another's steps and decide whether or not they agree with particular conclusions.

- Claiming someone else's work as your own or hiding their influence on your own ideas is a type of theft.

- If you plagiarize at Vassar, *even if you did not intend to*, you are responsible to the Academic Panel.

- Citing sources is not something you do "at the end" when you've finished a paper; keeping track of sources is integral to all stages of reading, researching, thinking and writing.

- One of the best guards against plagiarism is planning ahead.

- You can cite *any* idea. If you have an intellectual debt, whether it comes from a blog, a class lecture, or a personal conversation, you should acknowledge it.

- Whenever you borrow three or more words in a row, put them in quotation marks.

- You must provide a citation even if you summarize a source rather than quoting it directly.

- Closely paraphrasing a source–rather than summarizing or directly quoting it–can put you at risk for plagiarism in some disciplines but is acceptable in others. Ask your instructors about practices in different academic fields.

- You can't cut and paste from *Wikipedia* or any other online source and present it as your own work. Even if no author is listed, this is still plagiarism.

- Specific facts that never change, such as the date of a historical event, don't need citation.

- Make sure to get clear instructions from your professor before working with others on collaborative projects.

- A guide to citation forms and style guides in different disciplines is available at http://libguides.vassar.edu/citingsources

- When in doubt, cite.

- Neither this guide nor any other can substitute for conversation with your professors. Ask them first when you have questions. You can also get help from the Research Librarians, the Writing Center, your academic adviser, and the Dean of Studies office.