

## CHAPTER 16: CITATION, REFERENCING, AND AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

### Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- ✎ Explain the importance of proper citation and referencing.
- ✎ Apply major referencing styles correctly.
- ✎ Paraphrase and quote sources ethically.
- ✎ Identify and avoid different forms of plagiarism.

### Introduction

In the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of scholarly work, the principles of citation, referencing, and academic integrity serve as the pillars that uphold the credibility of research. Citation refers to the formal acknowledgment of the sources of information, ideas, or data that a researcher has consulted or incorporated into their work. It is a critical practice that not only gives credit to the original authors but also allows readers to trace the origin of ideas, evaluate sources, and further explore the topic.

Referencing, closely linked to citation, involves providing complete details of the cited sources in a systematic format, enabling verification and transparency. Proper referencing ensures that scholarly work maintains a standard of rigor, demonstrating the researcher's diligence and respect for intellectual property. Common referencing styles, such as Harvard, APA, or Chicago, offer structured frameworks for presenting bibliographic information consistently and accurately.

Avoiding plagiarism, the unethical act of presenting another person's ideas, words, or work as one's own, is central to maintaining the integrity of academic research. Plagiarism undermines the trustworthiness of scholarship, diminishes the value of original contributions, and can result in severe academic and professional consequences. Through careful citation, accurate referencing, and adherence to ethical standards, researchers safeguard the originality of their work while contributing responsibly to the collective knowledge of their discipline.

Understanding and practicing these principles is essential for all students, educators, and researchers, for they embody the respect for intellectual effort, promote transparency, and ensure that knowledge advances in an ethical and verifiable manner.

### Purpose of citations

Citations serve as the backbone of scholarly work, reflecting a researcher's commitment to academic honesty, intellectual rigor, and the advancement of knowledge. Their primary purpose is to acknowledge the original sources of ideas, theories, data, or findings that have influenced a researcher's work. By citing sources, a researcher demonstrates respect for the intellectual property of others, thereby upholding ethical standards and avoiding plagiarism.

Moreover, citations provide a roadmap for readers, enabling them to trace the origin of information, verify its accuracy, and explore related works for deeper understanding. They enhance the credibility of research by showing that arguments and conclusions are grounded in established knowledge rather than personal opinion alone.

Citations also facilitate scholarly dialogue, allowing researchers to situate their work within the broader academic conversation. By referencing prior studies, a researcher can build on existing knowledge, identify gaps, and contribute new insights in a coherent and verifiable manner. In addition, systematic citation helps maintain consistency, clarity, and organization in research

writing, ensuring that the work meets academic standards and is respected by peers, instructors, and the wider academic community.

Ultimately, the purpose of citations is not merely procedural; it is a reflection of integrity, transparency, and the collective advancement of knowledge.

### **Harvard, APA, MLA, and Chicago systems**

In academic writing, referencing systems provide structured methods for citing sources, ensuring clarity, consistency, and credibility. Each system has its own rules and conventions, tailored to the needs of different disciplines and scholarly practices.

#### **1. Harvard Referencing System**

The Harvard system is an author-date style, widely used in the social sciences, education, and business studies. In-text citations include the author's surname and year of publication (e.g., Hassan, 2023), while the reference list at the end of the work provides full details such as title, publisher, and place of publication. Harvard is valued for its simplicity, readability, and ease of use.

#### **2. APA (American Psychological Association) System**

APA style is predominantly used in psychology, education, and other social sciences. Like Harvard, it is an author-date style, but it has specific rules for formatting, including the use of a running head, double-spacing, and structured headings. In-text citations appear as (Hassan, 2023, p. 45), with a detailed reference list containing elements like DOI for digital sources. APA emphasizes precision, clarity, and ethical reporting of research findings.

#### **3. MLA (Modern Language Association) System**

MLA is commonly applied in the humanities, especially literature, arts, and cultural studies. It uses author-page style for in-text citations (e.g., Hassan 45) and includes a "Works Cited" page that lists sources alphabetically by the author's last name. MLA focuses on brevity in citations while ensuring readers can locate the sources efficiently, making it particularly suitable for textual analysis and interpretive studies.

#### **4. Chicago Referencing System**

The Chicago style offers two approaches:

- **Notes and Bibliography:** Often used in history, theology, and arts, it employs footnotes or endnotes for citations, with a bibliography providing full source details.
- **Author-Date:** Similar to Harvard and APA, it is used in sciences and social sciences.  
Chicago is versatile, accommodating a wide range of sources, including archival materials, and emphasizes historical accuracy and thorough documentation.

Each referencing system serves the same ultimate purpose: to give credit to original authors, avoid plagiarism, and provide readers with the means to locate sources for verification or further study. The choice of system often depends on the academic discipline, institutional guidelines, or the nature of the research.

### **Referencing electronic sources**

With the rapid growth of digital information, researchers increasingly rely on electronic sources, including online journals, e-books, websites, databases, and multimedia content. Proper referencing of these sources is essential to maintain academic integrity, ensure traceability, and give credit to original authors.

Referencing electronic sources follows the same principles as traditional sources: acknowledging the author, providing the title, publication date, and specifying where the source can be accessed. However, electronic sources require additional information such as URLs, DOIs (Digital Object Identifiers), or access dates to help readers locate the material precisely.

Different referencing styles have specific rules for electronic sources:

- **Harvard Style:** Includes author, year, title, edition (if applicable), and the URL with the access date.  
*Example:* Hassan, A.M. (2023). *Introduction to Technical Education*. Available at: <https://www.example.com> [Accessed 7 Jan 2026].
- **APA Style:** Requires author, publication year, title, source, and DOI or URL. For online articles, APA emphasizes providing direct links or DOI for permanent access.  
*Example:* Hassan, A.M. (2023). *Introduction to Technical Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.example.com>
- **MLA Style:** Lists author, title, website, publisher (if available), publication date, and URL. The access date is optional but recommended if the content is likely to change.  
*Example:* Hassan, Abdullahi M. *Introduction to Technical Education*. Example.com, 2023, <https://www.example.com>.
- **Chicago Style:** Notes and Bibliography format includes full citation with URL and access date in the footnotes or bibliography; the Author-Date system also incorporates URLs or DOI.  
*Example (Notes & Bibliography):* Abdullahi M. Hassan, *Introduction to Technical Education*, accessed January 7, 2026, <https://www.example.com>.

Referencing electronic sources is not merely a formality; it ensures transparency, avoids plagiarism, and allows readers to verify the authenticity of digital content, which is particularly important given the mutable nature of online information.

### Common citation mistakes

Citations are fundamental to academic integrity, but errors in citing sources are frequent and can undermine the credibility of research. Understanding common citation mistakes helps researchers maintain accuracy, avoid plagiarism, and present their work professionally.

#### 1. Omitting Citations

One of the most serious mistakes is failing to cite a source altogether. Even when information is paraphrased, ideas, theories, or data derived from another author must be acknowledged. Omitting citations can be considered plagiarism.

#### 2. Incorrect or Incomplete References

Providing partial information, such as leaving out the publication year, publisher, or page numbers, makes it difficult for readers to locate the source. Incomplete references reduce the reliability and professionalism of the work.

#### 3. Inconsistent Referencing Style

Mixing different citation styles (e.g., using APA in one section and Harvard in another) creates confusion and disrupts the uniformity of the research report. Maintaining a single, consistent style is essential.

#### 4. Misquoting or Misrepresenting Sources

Altering the meaning of the original text or quoting inaccurately can mislead readers and damage the researcher's credibility. Accurate representation of sources is vital to uphold academic honesty.

5. **Over-Citation or Under-Citation**

Over-citation occurs when every sentence is unnecessarily referenced, disrupting the flow of writing. Under-citation happens when critical ideas or data are presented without acknowledgment. Both extremes weaken the quality of the work.

6. **Improper Use of Secondary Sources**

Citing a source that was cited in another work without consulting the original material can lead to errors or misinterpretations. It is best to consult and cite primary sources directly whenever possible.

7. **Ignoring Electronic Source Requirements**

With online sources, mistakes often include missing URLs, DOIs, or access dates, or failing to differentiate between websites, e-books, and online journals. This makes it hard for readers to verify digital references.

8. **Plagiarism Due to Paraphrasing Errors**

Simply changing a few words from a source without proper citation is considered plagiarism. Effective paraphrasing requires rewriting the idea in one's own words while still citing the original author.

By being aware of these common mistakes and applying careful citation practices, researchers can ensure academic integrity, enhance the credibility of their work, and respect the intellectual contributions of others.

### **Paraphrasing ethically**

Paraphrasing is the practice of restating someone else's ideas or information in your own words while preserving the original meaning. When done ethically, it allows researchers to integrate the work of others into their writing without plagiarizing, demonstrating understanding, and contributing to a coherent scholarly narrative.

Ethical paraphrasing involves more than merely changing a few words or rearranging sentences; it requires digesting the original idea, understanding it fully, and expressing it in a fresh form, while giving credit to the original author through proper citation. This process shows respect for intellectual property and maintains the integrity of academic work.

The steps to paraphrase ethically include:

1. **Comprehend the Original Source:** Read the text carefully until you fully grasp the meaning.
2. **Rephrase in Your Own Words:** Write the idea as if explaining it to someone else, using your own vocabulary and sentence structure.
3. **Retain the Original Meaning:** Ensure that your version accurately reflects the author's intended message without distortion.
4. **Cite the Source:** Even though the words are yours, the idea is borrowed. Provide an in-text citation and include the source in your reference list.
5. **Avoid Patchwriting:** Do not simply substitute synonyms or slightly alter sentences, as this is considered unethical and can constitute plagiarism.

Ethical paraphrasing strengthens research by showing comprehension, linking ideas coherently, and allowing the writer to build arguments on a solid foundation of credible sources. It encourages critical engagement with material rather than mere reproduction, fostering originality while respecting the contributions of other scholars.

## Using quotation marks correctly

Quotation marks are essential tools in academic writing, used to indicate that words are taken directly from another source. Correct usage preserves the integrity of the original text, gives credit to the author, and helps avoid plagiarism.

### 1. Direct Quotations

Direct quotations are the exact words of an author. They must be enclosed in quotation marks and accompanied by an appropriate citation. This clearly distinguishes the borrowed material from your own writing.

*Example:* According to Hassan (2023), “Effective technical education requires a balance between theory and practical application” (p. 45).

### 2. Short vs. Long Quotations

- **Short quotations** (usually fewer than 40 words) are incorporated into the text and enclosed in quotation marks.
- **Long quotations** (block quotes, more than 40 words in APA or 4 lines in MLA) are presented as an indented block without quotation marks, with proper citation.

### 3. Quotation Within a Quotation

When quoting text that already contains a quotation, use single quotation marks inside double quotation marks.

*Example:* Hassan (2023) noted, “The students remarked, ‘We find practical sessions most engaging’” (p. 67).

### 4. Punctuation Placement

In American English, periods and commas are placed inside quotation marks, while colons and semicolons go outside. Question marks and exclamation points depend on whether they belong to the quoted material.

### 5. Citing Sources

Every direct quotation must be followed by an in-text citation including the author, year, and page number (if applicable), depending on the referencing style used.

### 6. Avoid Overusing Quotations

Excessive quoting can overwhelm your own voice. Use quotations sparingly to support arguments, illustrate points, or provide authoritative evidence. Paraphrasing is often preferable for smoother integration into your work.

By using quotation marks correctly, researchers maintain academic honesty, respect intellectual property, and ensure clarity for readers, distinguishing between their own analysis and the words of others.

## Building a reference list

A reference list is a systematic compilation of all the sources cited in a research work, providing full details that enable readers to locate and verify the materials. Constructing a proper reference list is a fundamental aspect of academic writing, ensuring transparency, credibility, and adherence to scholarly conventions.

### 1. Purpose of a Reference List

The reference list serves multiple purposes: it acknowledges the contributions of other authors, demonstrates the researcher’s diligence in consulting relevant literature, and

allows readers to trace the origin of ideas, theories, or data used in the work. A well-structured reference list also reflects professionalism and attention to detail.

## 2. **Organization and Order**

References are typically arranged alphabetically by the last name of the first author. Each entry should follow a consistent format according to the chosen referencing style (Harvard, APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.). Entries are usually double-spaced, with a hanging indent applied to the second and subsequent lines of each reference.

## 3. **Essential Elements of a Reference**

A complete reference generally includes:

- **Author(s):** Full name(s) of the author(s) or editor(s).
- **Year of Publication:** The year the work was published.
- **Title of Work:** Full title of the book, article, or report.
- **Publication Information:** Publisher, place of publication, or journal name and volume/issue number.
- **Electronic Source Details:** For online materials, include DOI, URL, or access date.

## 4. **Consistency with In-Text Citations**

Every source listed in the reference list must correspond to an in-text citation, and every in-text citation must appear in the reference list. This alignment ensures that readers can easily match ideas in the text with their original sources.

## 5. **Special Considerations**

- Group multiple works by the same author chronologically.
- For edited books or chapters, cite both the chapter author and editor.
- For online sources, ensure links are accurate and functional.

A carefully constructed reference list enhances the credibility of research, prevents plagiarism, and demonstrates mastery of academic conventions. It is not merely a formality but a reflection of scholarly integrity and meticulousness.

## **Understanding plagiarism policies**

Plagiarism, the act of presenting someone else's work, ideas, or words as one's own, is one of the most serious breaches of academic integrity. To prevent and address this, educational institutions, research bodies, and publishers establish plagiarism policies, which serve as formal guidelines defining what constitutes plagiarism, its consequences, and the ethical standards expected of scholars.

### 1. **Purpose of Plagiarism Policies**

Plagiarism policies exist to safeguard intellectual property, promote ethical scholarship, and maintain the credibility of academic work. They ensure that all contributors receive proper recognition for their ideas and that research outputs are trustworthy and verifiable.

### 2. **Defining Plagiarism**

Policies typically classify plagiarism into various forms, including:

- **Direct plagiarism:** Copying text word-for-word without quotation marks or citation.

- **Paraphrasing plagiarism:** Rewriting someone else’s ideas without proper acknowledgment.
- **Self-plagiarism:** Reusing one’s own previously submitted work without disclosure.
- **Mosaic plagiarism:** Piecing together ideas or phrases from multiple sources without credit.

### 3. Institutional Expectations

Most institutions require students and researchers to:

- Submit original work.
- Cite all sources accurately.
- Understand and comply with the chosen referencing style.
- Use plagiarism detection tools when required.

### 4. Consequences of Plagiarism

Violating plagiarism policies can lead to serious repercussions, including:

- Academic penalties (e.g., failing grades, course repetition).
- Disciplinary action (e.g., suspension or expulsion).
- Loss of professional credibility and reputation.

### 5. Promoting Ethical Scholarship

Understanding plagiarism policies encourages researchers to engage responsibly with sources, practice ethical paraphrasing, use quotations correctly, and maintain accurate reference lists. It fosters a culture of honesty, respect, and accountability, which is the foundation of all scholarly work.

In essence, plagiarism policies are not merely regulatory measures but are guiding principles that protect the integrity of research, honor intellectual contributions, and support the pursuit of genuine knowledge.

## Evaluation

1. What is the primary purpose of citing sources in academic writing, and how does it contribute to research integrity?
2. Explain the differences between Harvard, APA, MLA, and Chicago referencing systems and give an example of when each is most appropriately used.
3. Discuss the ethical principles of paraphrasing and outline the steps to ensure paraphrasing does not constitute plagiarism.
4. Identify common citation mistakes and explain how they can undermine the credibility of a research work.
5. What are plagiarism policies, and why is it important for students and researchers to understand and adhere to them?

## References

1. Kehinde, S. (2025). *Writing a Statement of Research Problem*. *Sar Journal*. This article outlines a structured three-stage approach to crafting problem statements by contrasting the ideal state, the existing reality, and the gap a useful framework for clear, impactful research design.

2. McCombes, S. & George, T. (2022, revised 2023). “How to Write a Problem Statement: Guide & Examples.” *Scribbr*. This guide emphasizes that a strong problem statement must contextualize what is known, define what needs investigation, show relevance, and set research objectives.
3. National University Research Writing and Analysis: “Problem Statement” guide. This resource states that a problem statement should clearly specify the problem, provide evidence of its existence, outline consequences of not addressing it, and highlight what remains unknown.