Writing Responsibly and Citing Sources

Why is research important?
With such easy access to information in today’s digital age, the answer to this question is no longer what it was even a decade ago. Because information is so easily acquired -- Google measures it in milliseconds -- the information itself matters less than what students can DO with that information. Students need to be able to locate, evaluate and synthesize the information in order to produce something meaningful and original with the information they have gained.

“Research is not simply the acquiring of information: it is the assimilation of information. It requires the researcher to have a voice in the world that first satisfies self. Research combines the process of self-discovery with external discovery — through the lens of point of view, in an examination of information outside of self. Cacophony becomes dialogue. It is the job of the writer of research to modulate the voices of the outsiders” (1).

Laura Hennessey DeSena
Preventing Plagiarism

Or, as Thomas Mallon, in Stolen Words, notes, “for students, especially, the Internet may sap the very need to create. It’s all there already, or so it seems; all the knowledge on a given subject, and all the competing viewpoints, in a machine you can carry around like a book. What’s there to add — and why dig a well instead of turning on the tap?” (246). Students must be given the opportunity and the tools to become active participants in the discussion of ideas, and in doing so they must participate ethically, which means avoiding plagiarism.

What is plagiarism?
Put simply, “using other people’s words and ideas without giving them credit is called plagiarism and is a form of intellectual stealing” (Write Source 369). To research properly, without committing plagiarism, students must know how to cite sources, both within the text and as a separate Works Cited page. “Obviously, in this electronic age, cutting and pasting is a simple task. If, in haste, a student forgets to cite the source of the quotes (cut and pasted materials), they are plagiarizing” (DeSena 8).

How can we help students to avoid plagiarism?
The most important skills that we can give our students to avoid plagiarism are the abilities to paraphrase, summarize, and quote accurately. Students should be given opportunities to practice these skills often, using a common textbook for instance, several times before being given a “research” assignment. They should practice writing their own sentences about a topic that includes both paraphrased and quoted material. Be sure to give students a consistent method for gathering, paraphrasing, quoting information that they locate on their own. Using notecards, a method that has been around for a long time, is still an effective method for avoiding plagiarism. Also, be sure to point out any
classroom and school policies that identify consequences for academic dishonesty. Last, the most effective method for helping students avoid plagiarism is to be sure that the assignments we give our students require them to USE the information they locate in some manner rather than simply GIVE the information they located back to us.

How do students cite their sources within the text?
Most textbooks, articles, and college writing use what are called “Parenthetical Citations.” This is an easy-to-use format that asks students to state the author’s last name and page number immediately after the use of words, ideas, or information that is not completely the student’s or is not what could be considered to be common knowledge:

When using images of the crashing sea and the violent rays on sunset together, Anne Sexton creates “great bursts of color and danger, signifying the weakness of our own bodies and souls” (Thompson 23). But Sexton has many other images as well…

- There is no comma or “p.” after the author’s name.
- If there is more than one book by the same author on the “Work Cited” page, write the first few words of the title.
- If there is no author, use the first few words of the title.
- Punctuation goes after the parentheses. The citation does not have to be at the end of the sentence.
- If the author’s name is stated in the sentence, it does not need to be restated it in the parenthetical citation:

According to David Wisk, a wind-powered city is “as impossible to imagine as it was for a pre-20th century citizen to imagine a light bulb, but no less possible” (7).

- A source must be cited even if it is not directly quoted. Remember, if the idea itself is someone else’s, it must be cited:

Anne Sexton’s poetry reminds us that we as mortals do not have much power over our own existences (Wilson 199), and we need to appreciate what we can of the world around us. Sexton also goes on to …

How do students cite their sources on a Work Cited page?
See following pages for help creating a Work Cited page. Be sure to use the resource available to your students called Citation Maker, available at oslis.org. Traditionally, students in the humanities format their Work Cited page – or bibliography – in MLA format, while students in the sciences use APA format. In middle and high school, however, most teachers require only the MLA format, shown in the examples on the following page. APA formatting assistance is available at oslis.org.
Work Cited Page (MLA Format)

All the information that you used in preparing the final copy of your paper must be listed on your “Work Cited” page. Do not include a source from which you did not gain any relevant information. Guidelines for your page:

- List your sources alphabetically by author’s or editor’s last name. If a source does not have an author/editor alphabetize it by title.
- Double space the list and use the hanging indentation (opposite of paragraph indent).
- Underline titles of books, journals, magazines. Put article titles or individual entries in quotations. Use a period at the end of each entry. Do not number them.

All examples appear at http://secondary.educator.oslis.org/resources/cm/mlacitationss

PRINT

Books:

Magazine/Newspaper:

Encyclopedia

Internet (date refers to the date you accessed the website)

Magazine

Article from database

Newspaper
Personal website:

Professional website (no author identified)
"Charting Data at the Bottom of the World." O'Reilly Network - Articles. 4 May 2006. 
O'Reilly. 15 May 2006 <http://www.perl.com/pub/a/2006/05/04/charting-
data.html>.

Blog Posting
Shaksper. The Global Electronic Shakespeare Conf. 23 Sept. 2002
<http://www.shaksper.net/arch/1994

OTHERS
Film
The Terminal. Dir. Steven Spielberg. With Tom Hanks and Catherine Zeta Jones. DVD.  

Interview

Recording