Avoiding Plagiarism - Examples in MLA Formatting

Please Cite Responsibly

Whenever you work with sources, whether it is a research paper, a comparison essay, or a literary analysis, you are responsible for giving full credit to the authors of those sources, including any words, ideas, or specific information borrowed or used. Any failure to acknowledge completely and correctly your use of sources is considered PLAGIARISM and is a serious breach of academic honesty.

Ways to work with information taken from others:

1. **DIRECT QUOTATION**: placing another person’s words in quotation marks
   
   *Example:*
   
   As one historian notes, “[t]he monarch . . . was expected to employ whatever violence was necessary in pursuit of social stability and safety for his subjects” (McGlynn 54).

2. **PARAPHRASE**: another’s ideas or information, in your own words
   
   *Example:*
   
   A medieval ruler used dreadful punishments to protect his subjects and keep them in line, and his subjects accepted this policy (McGlynn 54).

3. **SUMMARY**: re-telling or condensing work done by another, in your own words
   
   *Example:*
   
   One historian states that medieval rulers punished criminals in violent, frightening ways to fight crime and maintain order. The rulers’ subjects expected and supported this kind of justice (McGlynn 54).

4. **SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE**: an idea or information attributable to a writer or work
   
   *Example:*
   
   Trial by “water ordeal,” which operated on the premise that the innocent would sink while the guilty would float, is a practice that was legally established as far back as the late 12th century (McGlynn 55-56).

5. **GENERAL KNOWLEDGE**: information found in one or more sources but generally known—no citation needed
   
   *Example:*
   
   Medieval European life was grim and barbaric by today’s standards. Frequent wars, widespread disease, and institutionalized cruelty were just a few of the problems medieval societies faced.

Reminders:

- As a general rule, if you didn’t write it, you have to cite it.
- If you are quoting directly, be sure to copy the passage down character for character, even if the original seems strange or wrong.
- If you need to change a word in order to make the quote fit into your paper, use brackets [ ] around the word or character you changed. Only do this to improve the clarity of the quote, never to change its meaning.
- If you need to skip over a word or phrase, use an ellipsis . . . Again, this is used to improve the clarity of the quote, never to change its meaning.
- If you are worried about plagiarizing, cite the borrowed text while you write your paper. Never leave the citations to do last because you might forget to go back or, as often happens, will not be able to find the citation in the source again.