**Citation Obligations (*MLA Handbook*)**

**By Mark Allen Hahlen, Ph.D.**

**Dallas Christian College**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **What I Did In My Document** |  | **My Citation Obligations****(i.e., If I don’t do these, I’m plagiarizing.)** |
| I *quoted* a sentence(s) from a source.Special Note: Sources would include textbooks, student guide, and classroom lecture material.  | → | 1. Enclose the quoted material in quotation marks2. Cite the source quoted by providing a parenthetical note at the end of the quoted material.3. Provide a bibliographic entry for the source in the bibliography. |
| I wrote a sentence(s) that *contains a quote from a source, but I altered the quote here and there* by omitting some words or changing some words.Special Note: Sources would include textbooks, student guide, and classroom lecture material. | → | 1a. Enclose in quotation marks only those portions of the sentence(s) that are verbatim quotes. Leave the remainder outside the quotation marks.Or1b. If you altered the quoted material by omitting a word or phrase, provide ellipsis dots indicating the exclusion of those words. Enclose the whole sentence(s) in quotation marks.Or1c. If you altered the quote by changing a word in order to make the quotation fit grammatically with the surrounding text, type the altered word in square brackets, and enclose the whole sentence(s) in quotation marks.2. Cite the source used by providing a parenthetical note at the end of the material used.3. Provide a bibliographic entry for the source in the bibliography.\* Special Note: Any sequence of four or more words that appears as it appears in the original source must be enclosed in quotation marks. |
| I *summarized* content from a source, but did not quote the source.Special Note: Sources would include textbooks, student guide, and classroom lecture material. | → | 1. Cite the source summarized by providing a parenthetical note at the end of the summarized material.2. Provide a bibliographic entry for the source in the bibliography.\* Special Note: Any sequence of four or more words that appears as it appears in the original source must be enclosed in quotation marks. |
| I *paraphrased* content from a source, but did not quote the source.Special Note: Sources would include textbooks, student guide, and classroom lecture material. | → | 1. Cite the source paraphrased by providing a parenthetical note at the end of the summarized material.2. Provide a bibliographic entry for the source in the bibliography.\* Special Note: Any sequence of four or more words that appears as it appears in the original source must be enclosed in quotation marks. |

**Some Special Notes to Which One Should Pay Close Attention**

**When Have You Documented a Source Completely**

You are required to document fully your resources. In order to attribute completely your content to a source, you must:

 1. **Provide a parenthetical note within the body of the text that indicates the source being cited**.

 See the current edition of Ham and Snyder, “A Student’s Guide to *The MLA Handbook,*” Hahlen, “The Educated Dummies’ Guide to MLA Documentation,” or *The MLA Handbook* for the proper forms of parenthetical notation.

 2. **Provide an entry for the source in the bibliography.**

 See the current edition of Ham and Snyder, “A Student’s Guide to *The MLA Handbook,*” Hahlen, “The Educated Dummies’ Guide to MLA Documentation,” *The MLA Handbook*, or “MLA Citation of Logos Resources” for the proper bibliographic forms.

 3. **Enclose in quotation marks those portions of the text which have been quoted verbatim from the source**.

**The Bible Is a Source**

Do not forget that the Bible is a source. Consequently, you must use parenthetical notes to cite the biblical passages you quote, summarize, or paraphrase within your document. If you don’t know where the Bible says what you allege it says, use a concordance or use the Search functions in Logos or other Bible software to find where it says what you think it says.

**Common Knowledge**

You are not obligated to cite a source for what is called “common knowledge.” The problem is figuring out what constitutes “common knowledge.” One may think of “common knowledge” as information that an educated member of one’s culture would be familiar with or could easily find in general reference works. Such data includes things like prominent events, dates, and ideas no longer considered under discussion and debate (e.g., The Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776; Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC; After the Spanish-American War and World War I, America was considered to be a world power; The gospel of Mark focuses more on the actions of Jesus than on his teaching).

Some questions you could ask to determine whether something is “common knowledge” would include:

1. Would the average person my age in this course know this?
2. Would the average adult in my church know this?
3. Would the average person in my culture be able to find this information in five independent sources commonly available to the public?

The sort of sources referred to in this last question would be general dictionaries or encyclopedias and websites that are not linked with one another. Note carefully that a dictionary or encyclopedia related to a specific field of study (e.g., Bible dictionary; sports encyclopedia; dictionary of psychological terms) is *not* a general dictionary or encyclopedia. Not every idea or piece of information found in five independent sources is “common knowledge” if there is still discussion, question, or disagreement about the information or idea or if the average person in the culture would be unfamiliar with it.

**The Difference Among Quote, Paraphrase, and Summary**

Those unfamiliar with the distinction among quotation, paraphrase, and summary are encouraged to go the OWL site (Online Writing Lab), sponsored by Purdue University for a helpful discussion of the distinctions among these concepts (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/1/>). Remember, all require attribution of the original source via parenthetical notes in MLA or via footnotes in other style guides.