



Tracking Ideas and Sources

Learning Objectives

After reading and studying this chapter, students should be able to do the following:

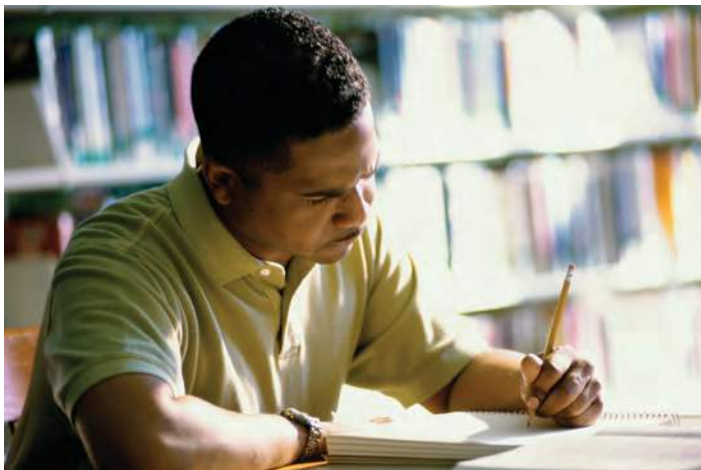
- Understand how tracking ideas and sources can be effectively used to improve scholarly writing.
- Apply the utility of generating reference notes and idea notes to track the sources reviewed and the ideas extracted, respectively.
- Identify a useful method of tracking ideas and sources, whether paper-based or digital, weighing benefits and pitfalls of the different methods.
- Recognize the importance of both analysis and synthesis in social science research, and understand that synthesis is a complex (and valuable) skill acquired over time and practice.
- Appreciate the challenge of tracking the source of ideas, whether those ideas are original to the student, believed to be common knowledge, or cited using appropriate APA conventions.
- Realize the dangers and pitfalls of plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, and be able to apply tactics from this chapter to minimize the risk of plagiarized work.

The process of writing in the social sciences is precisely that—a process. The previous chapter emphasized the notion of critiquing, critical thinking, and being a savvy consumer of existing research. This chapter provides the next steps in the process of writing like a social scientist. The analysis and evaluations of prior work will be the central focus of writing an introduction section, but the ability to generate ideas and track sources is critical for making proper attributions and avoiding plagiarism. There are so many rules and regulations about formal scholarly writing in the social sciences that it may seem like a jungle out there, with dangers and pitfalls awaiting at every turn. By utilizing the methods, techniques, and advice offered throughout this chapter, one can avoid some of those potential risks and concentrate more on a successful journey. This is like a preventative treatment to avoid cavities!

Think about the student who has given much thought to the assignment. He or she fully understands what the instructor wants and has an idea about a good story to tell about a selected topic in the social sciences. Exploration of the databases is complete, looking both broadly and deeply, and resources that appear relevant have been identified (mostly journal articles, but some books, and other sources). Immediately available resources have been downloaded as PDFs or HTML files, and the rest have been requested through inter-library loan. When all articles and resources arrive, the student might assume that now it is time to start writing the first rough draft of the introduction section, which contains the literature review. Not quite! That same student needs to read and process each of those resources retrieved and acquired. This chapter describes different approaches for analyzing and extracting information, organizing it, and then putting it back together (synthesis) such that the introduction is more coherent and demonstrates the student's ability to write like a social scientist.

6.1 The Importance of Taking Notes

After gathering the sources for the paper, it is time to critically read and analyze what parts of these multiple stories may be pertinent for the writing assignment. There



Organizing research and ideas beforehand allows for a smooth writing process.

is no “right or wrong” way to do this, and there are numerous approaches. The organization of ideas beforehand will make composition later seem easy. In essence, this is a “pay me now or pay me later” scenario. Crafting a well-written research document that analyzes and synthesizes the available research on a complex topic is hard; there are no easy shortcuts except to plagiarize (more on avoiding plagiarism at the end of this chapter). Naturally, the “pay me now” option is preferable: Getting to know what the sources contain and

truly understanding the individual ideas extracted may be time-consuming upfront, but it often results in better writing—and thus better grades and skill development. Having a method of note taking will allow one to scan through many potential sources relatively quickly and systematically.

Also, integrating multiple sources from the research in a paper shows signs of scholarly writing. When the literature is exhausted and the topic is understood top to bottom, chances are that the synthesis of these ideas will be well done. The difference between a good paper and an excellent paper is often the level of synthesis. By taking notes while reviewing the literature, writers organize their thoughts and ideas beforehand rather than at the moment of paper creation/typing/completion.

Of course, before taking notes, one needs to have the topic identified, making sure that it adheres to the instructor's assignment. While searching databases for relevant work, start to flesh out an outline of the three or four major points. One may have already formed these ideas before starting, or just reading the titles and abstracts of some of the resources retrieved through the literature search may have provided ideas for points and sub-points of an outline.

Tracking Ideas

Essentially, there are three different strategies for taking notes on one's sources—quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing (Harris, 2005; University of Maryland University College, 2005). Harris (2005) offered a number of situations in which students would be interested in using a direct quotation from another source in their own work: expert declaration, direct support, effective language, historical flavor, specific example, controversial statement, or material for analysis. Use direct quotes sparingly, and be sure to adhere to the instructor's assignment guidelines. Scholarly writing does not involve a string of quotations; scholarly writing involves the interpretation and communication of ideas in the proper form. A string of direct quotations in a paper essentially means that other authors "wrote" the paper.

Use a direct quotation only when an author has said something so eloquently that a paraphrase or a summary would dramatically lessen the meaning or impact of the original statement. For many writers, it is difficult to know when to use a direct quote and when not to use a direct quote. Sadly, there is no "rule" to follow. But think about this: Would the deletion of that quotation from the paper make the paper more difficult to comprehend? Also remember to think about the nature of the assignment and the instructor's preferences—if in doubt about the use of direct quotes in an assignment paper, ask for help! Direct quotes used sparingly and purposefully can be powerful; too many direct quotes and it may look like laziness to an instructor. When considering the potential use of a direct quote from a particular source, write down the direct quote *and note the page number from the original source*. In APA format (APA, 2010), the use of a direct quotation requires reporting the page number (or in some cases, paragraph number) from the quotation source. Also, if a long quote is used (more than 40 words), APA format requires that the quote be indented in the text (see the *Publication Manual* for more specific details). One last concern about quoting: Too much quoting should not occur from a single source (Harris, 2005). If the goal of the assignment is to integrate and summarize previous research, quoting (or even citing) the same source over and over again shows no comprehensive review of the literature or synthesis of ideas from multiple sources.

A paraphrase is very different from a direct quotation in that a paraphrase is a translation of the writer's original words into one's own words, roughly using the same amount of words (Harris, 2005; University of Maryland University College, 2005). Paraphrasing is seen as more scholarly than most because it demonstrates a deeper understanding of the original work; in fact, it is quite a talent to be able to take others' ideas and convert them into a less complex form (it is an important part of what good teachers do). Paraphrasing allows rewording, simplifying, or clarification of the meaning of the original writer. When recording ideas, most notes should be paraphrases.

A summary is similar to a paraphrase in that one translates the author's original words into one's own, but a summary is shorter than the original (Harris, 2005). Key benefits to summaries include simplifying and condensing the author's original ideas. The writer of a paper may not have the luxury of unlimited space to communicate his or her ideas, so summaries may help the writer adhere to assignment guidelines. Summaries are also a good strategy when extracting information for later notes.

Tracking Sources

A student should also be recording a source's details—author, publisher, and so forth—while reviewing the literature. (In fact, it might be easier to write down the full reference first and then start reading. The next section discusses how a researcher might keep ideas linked with their references.) Whether using a direct quote, paraphrase, or summary, giving credit where credit is due is important—failure to do so means plagiarism, which can have serious repercussions (more on plagiarism in a bit). APA format requires a references page that lists every reference cited in the main text of the paper. These references are more important than a student might originally think. The reference list shows off an “academic pedigree”; that is, it shows the line of thinking and research that the writer followed to place the present work in its proper context. When writing about a particular topic, knowing which references are important enough to include is an acquired skill; so by expressing the proper context of why a particular study is important, the writer communicates an understanding of important studies. Often, an instructor will know how much effort the student put into the writing assignment by examining the extent of the references cited in the paper. The reference list should be meticulously prepared, and note that there are many different APA format rules for the different types of materials referenced. The sample papers in the appendix provide some tips on properly preparing reference citations in APA format, as does the Ashford online library. As always, be sure to heed the instructor's advice and use the preferred referencing method; several other methods outside of APA also exist.

It may appear that taking notes involves much work; it does. But the benefits are clear: A student will better understand the research materials *before* writing the paper. However, taking notes works best if used completely: that is, every reference examined and every idea that could be used is written down. If this is done upfront, then creating the final product—the final research paper—is greatly facilitated. There will be no need to scramble at the last minute for the journal title or volume when typing the references—or flip through pages and pages to locate some tidbit of information.

6.2 Note-Taking Strategies

There are certainly many different ways to record information about a topic for later use in writing a paper. This section presents one such system for taking notes—an “old school” method using paper-based notecards—but also discusses more current digital alternatives to the paper approach. Find a way that works, and then augment and adapt the system for personal preference.

“Old School”: The Notecard Method

In this age of computers, it is likely that many students will choose to record ideas and references in some electronic form. These digital alternatives will be discussed in depth, but not before we explore something a little more old-fashioned: the notecard method. Think of it this way—when a student first learns how to do math, that process starts with paper and pencil, doing the problems long-hand. After mastering the concepts, *then* a calculator is made available. The same holds true here—work with the paper version first to truly understand the process, *then* switch to the electronic version if preferred.

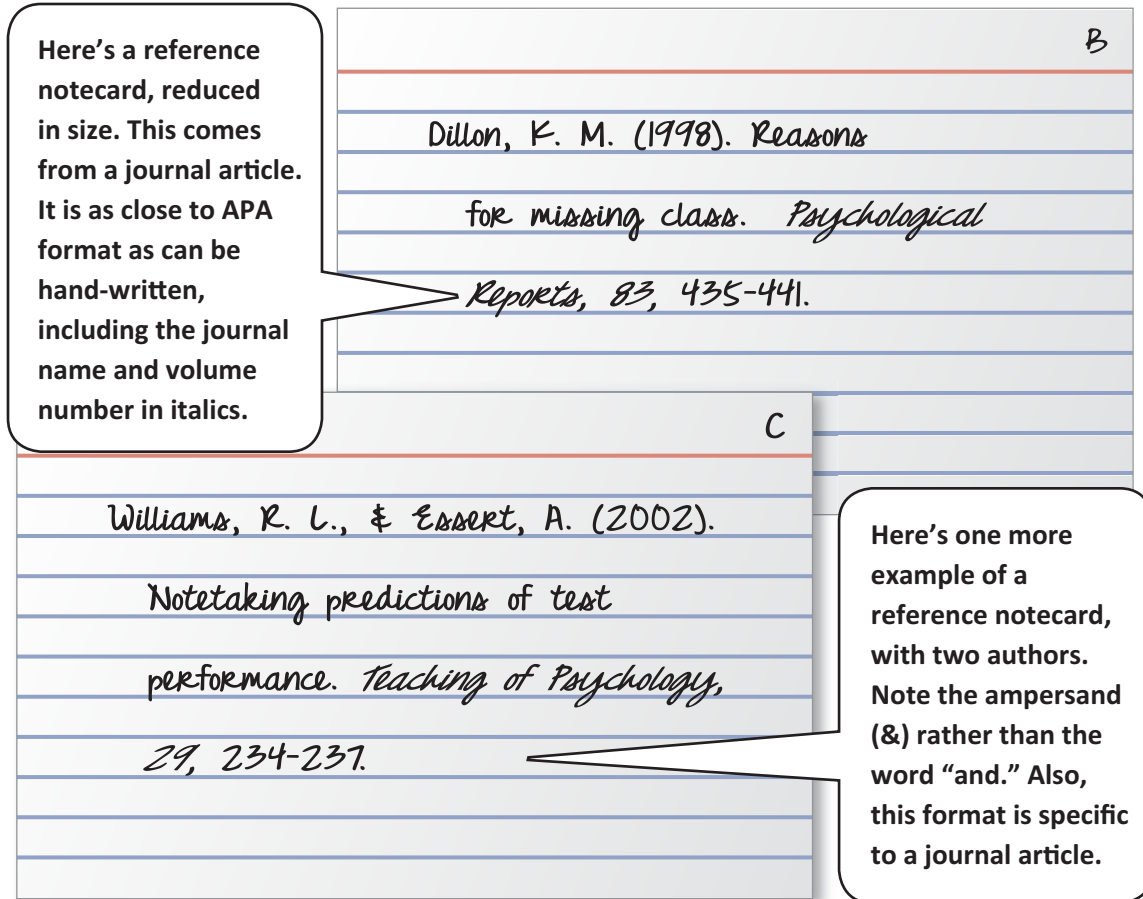
The **notecard method** involves noting single ideas on 4×6 -inch index cards—“idea notecards,” for tracking ideas—and coding those ideas to their sources, which are noted on 3×5 -inch index cards—“reference notecards,” for tracking sources.

To create a reference notecard (see Figure 6.1), write down only one reference on a 3×5 -inch notecard. In the upper left corner, give each reference a code (A, B, C, etc.). Write each reference in APA style (see Appendix A). Writing the reference notecard in APA format saves time later when one is typing the reference section of the paper, and putting one reference per card makes it easy to alphabetize the references.



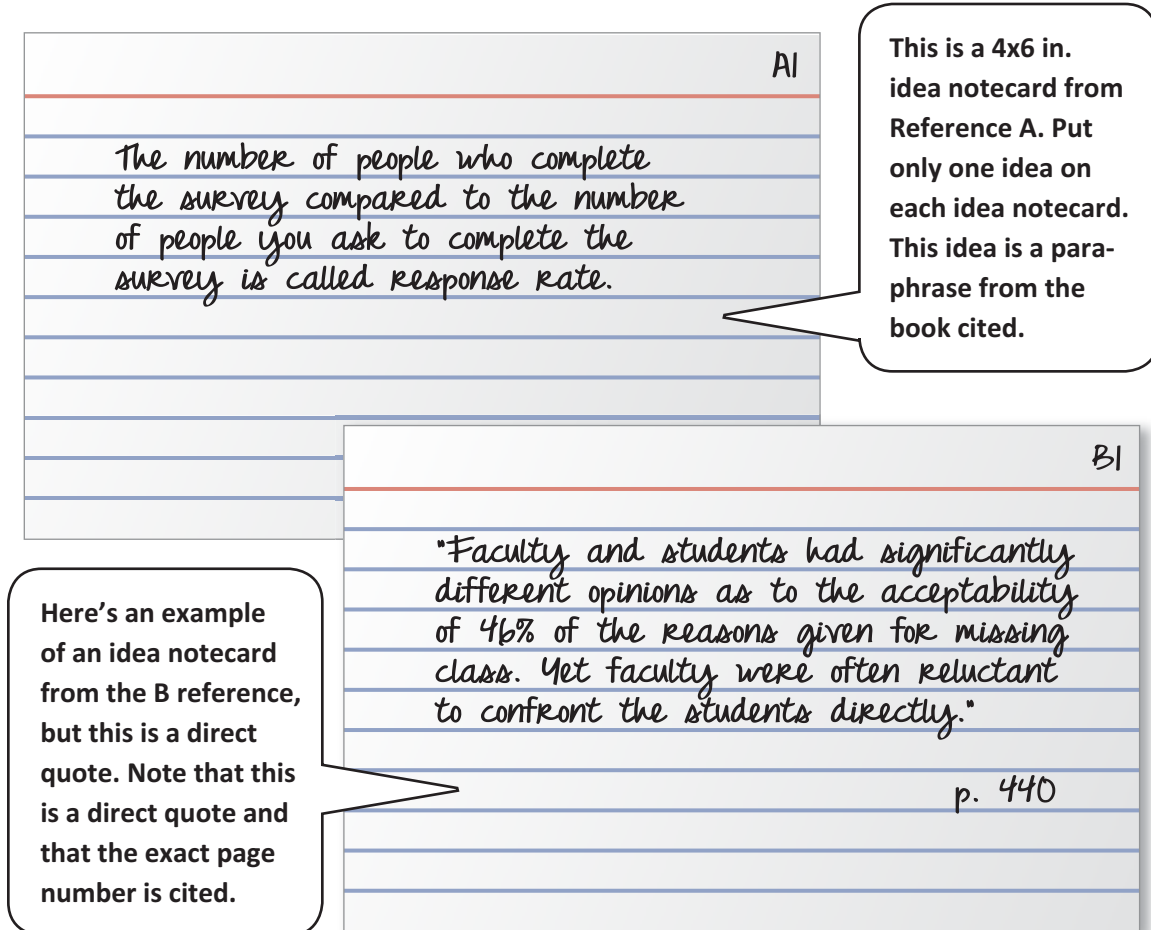
Tracking sources can be an overwhelming task, but following the notecard method, either “old school” or digital, easily organizes references and ensures each source is cited correctly.

Figure 6.1: Reference notecards



To create an idea card (see Figure 6.2), while reading, write down any idea that might be used in the paper on a 4 x 6-inch notecard. *Write only one idea on each card.* So for Reference A, there may be four separate ideas possibly incorporated into the paper, labeled A1, A2, A3, and A4 in the top corner. Recording a single idea on an idea notecard will make it an easy task to organize, arrange, and rearrange ideas into a coherent story, complete with reference material and integrated in such a way to demonstrate one's scholarly writing ability.

Figure 6.2: Idea notecards



Notes in the Digital Age

The notecard method can be adapted for electronic use and still be tactile (i.e., if printed, the notes can be physically ordered) or entirely paperless. Although some like the old-school notecard method, in fairness, there are disadvantages: It is laborious, time-consuming, and uses many cards (Eisenberg, 2002), for example. To that end, a number of computer-based alternatives are available for use. Some of these techniques make use of existing computer programs, whereas others are programs specifically designed for note taking and writing. The advantages to taking notes via a computer program include the ability to

- download from websites directly into a note file,
- cut and paste data directly,
- move information around electronically rather than physically,
- have a legible set of notes no matter one's handwriting, and

- cut and paste bibliographic information directly (Wiley Publishing, 2007).

However, to be fair here as well, there are disadvantages to computer note taking:

- Backing up the notes frequently is necessary, or work may be lost.
- Scrolling to see the work makes seeing the big picture all at once a difficult task.
- Moving bits of information around using cut and paste until the ideas are in the order desired is time consuming.
- Entering notes on a computer interrupts reading (Wiley Publishing, 2007).

Some of these disadvantages also apply to the paper version, such as interrupting reading to take notes on notecards. In the end, experiment with different approaches to see what works best.

Existing software programs can be used to customize one's computer-based notetaking approach. Microsoft Word™ can be used to organize references and ideas for the integration of ideas. However, some people like the tactile feedback of moving the cards around. Thus, after typing into Word, idea notes could be printed and the printed ideas cut into strips and moved around physically until they are in a desired order. One might also use Microsoft Excel™ and create a spreadsheet that tracks reference materials and ideas (Geldon, 2002), or perhaps a relational database like Microsoft Access™ could be used to organize large volumes of complex ideas. Eisenberg (2002) suggested using Microsoft PowerPoint™ for the notecard method. The nice feature of this approach is that once the notecards are created as separate slides, the slide sorter feature in PowerPoint can be used to arrange the ideas (slides) in any order desired. By including the bibliographic information in the header of each slide, the reference and idea notecards are combined in each slide—this appears to be a very nice alternative to using actual paper notecards if one is so inclined.

There are other specialized notetaking programs as well. Microsoft offers the specialized program OneNote™ to assist in notetaking and information management. Some of the features of OneNote include the ability to capture web pages, hyperlink, use file attachments, create tables, access drawing tools, and recognize text embedded in pictures (Microsoft Corporation, 2007). Using this program could have the added benefit of direct integration with other Microsoft programs possibly in use. Another software alternative is Nota Bene™. This software is designed for academic research and writing, with numerous tools to handle word processing, organize a general database as well as a bibliographic database (all of your references), a search engine, and more (Nota Bene, n.d.). A less complex alternative to OneNote and Nota Bene would be a program like ndxCards™, which allows you to electronically take notes and then export those notes (and reference list information) to a word processor (TruTamil, 2004). More options that you might explore (with URLs) include:

- Zotero (www.zotero.org/)
- Endnote Web (www.myendnoteweb.com/)
- Endnote (www.endnote.com/)
- Mendeley (www.mendeley.com/)
- ProCite (www.procite.com/)
- Reference Manager (www.refman.com/)

A student should select whatever approach meets his or her basic needs without becoming too complicated. The bottom line is to be able to consider ideas individually and sort those ideas while preserving the source from which the idea originated. Using some variation of the notecard method in scientific writing will help a student tell a better story.

Ashford University specifically offers the tool RefWorks (see *Tips & Tools: Getting Started with RefWorks*) to help its students manage citations and references. RefWorks is compatible with the other search databases Ashford subscribes to, so students can, for example, export a journal article's citation directly from the database to RefWorks. From there, the student can store and organize these citations and generate APA-formatted bibliographies and citations during the writing process. However, it is important that students not depend wholly on RefWorks and other programs to take care of all their APA-formatting needs. When such digital tools are not available, students should have full confidence in their own abilities.



Tips & Tools: Getting Started with RefWorks

Students wanting to use RefWorks will first need to create an account. Visit <http://www.refworks.com/refworks2/> and use the group code RWashfordU to start creating an individual user account.

This information and other helpful RefWorks links are available at the Ashford Writing Center and the Ashford online library.

As the stack—physical or electronic—of notes for the paper builds, the student can go back to the outline and work to fit the notes into the outline. The outline may require adjustment based on the information gleaned, or one may discover that a point in the outline is unsupported by evidence, prompting a return to the literature to retrieve more information (and take more notes). A student should go back and forth here as much as needed because all of this work is going to pay off when writing begins—particularly on the first draft of the introduction

section to the research paper, which contains a review of the literature on the topic. A student should keep repeating this process—looking at the road map (outline) and planning the route (notes)—until he or she is comfortable enough to start the journey. Careful preplanning upfront often makes complicated tasks go smoother in the long run.

Now, it's time to actually start writing the paper. Of course, at this point, much of the writing and idea formation is complete, thanks to an assembled outline and organized notes. Some points to remember: The text must be readable, providing the necessary transition between ideas. Be sure to include a title with the rough draft. Remember that this is a rough draft, not the finished product. See if the instructor will review the rough draft without assigning a grade. If this option is not available, a classmate might be available to read the paper. With the rough draft, the reference list is typically not required, but a student should check with the instructor. The reference list normally appears at the end of the paper, although sources should be cited in the draft text using APA format. Finally, a student should welcome numerous edits and comments on a returned draft as free advice. Remember, the rough draft is not the final version; the comments should help to improve the paper. At some point, we all need outside consultants to help us improve and sharpen our skills.

6.3 Proper Attributions: Your Own Ideas Versus the Ideas of Others

The entire concept of the notecard method and related strategies is designed to help track the ideas of others and to be able to give credit where credit is due (and avoid plagiarism, discussed in the next section). But it is difficult to determine at times where an idea came from—that is, did the student read about the idea elsewhere, or is it the student’s original idea? This is analogous to early childhood memories—as we get older, it is sometimes hard to differentiate our memory for an event versus our memories of hearing the family stories about an event. So it is not as straightforward at times to figure out the source, as is (purposely) oversimplified in Figure 6.3 (Harris, 2005). Further, what one assumes to be “common knowledge” might not be as common as once thought. So how does a student write a paper giving credit where credit is due but also expressing original ideas?

Harris (2005) offered expert advice about common knowledge and some of the pitfalls of relying on common knowledge in scholarly writing. He described the types of common knowledge as easily observable information (e.g., many trees lose their leaves in the fall), commonly reported facts (e.g., the founding date for psychology is 1879), and common sayings (e.g., pay me now or pay me later). However, Harris also offered a number of warnings and cautions about relying on common knowledge, especially without attribution (citation) in a scholarly paper:

- Hearing or reading the information in multiple locations does not make it “common.”
- A person’s interpretation of common knowledge often gets intertwined with the knowledge.
- There is often disagreement about the accuracy of common knowledge.

Finally, Harris (2005) offered what he described as the “Golden Test”:

[Ask] yourself about how your reader might understand the source of the information. In other words, ask the question, “will my reader likely believe that this information originated with me when it did not?” If the answer is “yes,” then you need a citation to correct your reader’s misunderstanding. (p. 23)

6.4 Avoiding Plagiarism

Essentially, **plagiarism** is when one borrows intellectual property without crediting the original source. Giving credit where credit is due is vital. In all of the social sciences, we are ultra-careful about this, which is one of the reasons we pay so much attention to references and the format of the references: They provide the breadcrumbs, so that the reader can follow the intellectual path of the writer. There are at least two different categories of plagiarism: intentional and unintentional, although other authors sometimes refer to unintentional plagiarism as sloppy writing (Harris, 2005). **Intentional plagiarism** means what it says: cheating on purpose. Oftentimes intentional plagiarism occurs when

students procrastinate and panic when they are under a deadline to complete a writing assignment (Roig, 2008). Some examples of intentional plagiarism include

- downloading and turning in a paper from the Web;
- including a graph or table from someone else's work without proper citation;
- copying phrases, sentences, or paragraphs from others' work without using proper citation or quotation format;
- paraphrasing or summarizing others' work without citation; and
- turning in one's own previously written work when prohibited to do so by the instructor (Harris, 2005).

Roig (2008) referred to this last practice as "double-dipping."

So to give credit where credit is due, there are three basic strategies: paraphrasing, summarizing, and quoting (the same three strategies for recording information and ideas). Recall that paraphrasing is putting someone else's ideas or words into one's own words, and the amount of words used is roughly equivalent to the amount of words from the original source. Summarizing is providing an overview of the main points of someone else's work, and the result is shorter than the original (Harris, 2005). A direct quote is just that—using the exact words of the original author.

Unintentional plagiarism can occur through a number of methods. For example, a student might not completely understand the rules for citation, might be careless when taking notes, might be citing uninformed opinions from the Internet, or might be sloppy in following APA rules for citation (Harris, 2005). A common phrase is "ignorance of the law is no excuse for breaking the law." The same principle applies here: Just because one may be unaware of the plagiarism does not make the plagiarism acceptable. The best protection is to know, understand, and apply the rules for proper citation in APA format. Following this chapter's suggestions for taking notes—whether in analog or digital form—can help to minimize the risk of plagiarism. Harris (2005) suggested this guideline: "If the information came from outside your own head, cite the source" (p. 16). Instructors can help make the distinctions between what needs to be cited and what doesn't. Be careful with common knowledge as well (see previous section) because sometimes it's not always as common as everyone thinks. If the information to be presented as common knowledge truly is common knowledge, then it should not be that difficult to locate a reference citation to support the claim as an added measure of avoiding plagiarism. Although some may not think that plagiarizing is a big deal, it often is. This listing in Table 6.1 is modified from Appleby (2005, p. 9).



Harris suggests, "If the information came from outside your own head, cite the source" (p. 16). In this photo, University of Maryland professor Chris Hansen discusses the ethics of plagiarism with his journalism students. These types of conversations are happening in universities all over the globe in order to communicate the severity of plagiarism.

Table 6.1: Reasons plagiarism is wrong

1. It is considered a criminal offense (i.e., the theft of intellectual property) and can result in fines and/or imprisonment.
2. It is academically dishonest and can lead to serious sanctions from the university.
3. It undermines the academic integrity and ethical atmosphere of the university.
4. It violates the mission of higher education to emphasize “a respect for knowledge.”
5. It involves a passive learning process that obstructs the acquisition and understanding of meaningful academic material.
6. It stalls or retards intellectual, moral, and social development.
7. It is contrary to the concept of critical thinking.
8. It promotes feelings of lowered self-esteem in those who believe they must practice it to survive academically.
9. It produces alumni whose inferior knowledge, abilities, and moral standards tarnish the public image of the college and lower the perceived value of a degree in the eyes of those who evaluate current students who are seeking employment or admission into graduate school.
10. It violates the code of ethics of professional societies that represent the social sciences.

What Is and Is Not Plagiarism?

Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate between plagiarism and sloppy citation style, which emphasizes the importance of learning about proper citations in APA style and how to avoid plagiarism. This section presents some of these “sticky situations,” and readers can practice a bit with determining whether the writing constitutes plagiarism or the misuse of sources. The idea and source of this exercise come from Shadle (2006), but the actual source material comes from Price (2002). Here is the original text with the proper APA reference:

But plagiarism is not stable. What we think of as plagiarism shifts across historical time periods, across cultures, across workplaces, even across academic disciplines. We need to stop treating plagiarism like a pure moral absolute (“Thou shalt not plagiarize”) and start explaining it in a way that accounts for these shifting features of contexts.

Price, M. (2002). *Beyond “Gotcha!”: Situating plagiarism in policy and pedagogy*. *College Composition and Communication*, 54, 88–115.

If a student was going to use that as a direct quote in an APA style paper, here is what it would look like (note that the text is indented because the quote is longer than 40 words):

But plagiarism is not stable. What we think of as plagiarism shifts across historical time periods, across cultures, across workplaces, even across academic disciplines. We need to stop treating plagiarism like a pure moral absolute (“Thou shalt not plagiarize”) and start explaining it in a way that accounts for these shifting features of contexts. (Price, 2002, p. 90)

But what if a student was to write a paragraph in his or her paper exactly like the one in the box below—would this be plagiarism?

Plagiarism is very difficult to understand because it is not stable. What we think of as plagiarism shifts across historical time periods, across cultures, across workplaces, even across academic disciplines. We need to stop treating plagiarism like a pure moral absolute and start explaining it in a way that accounts for these shifting features of contexts.

For many faculty, the answer would be YES, this is plagiarism. Not only are most of the phrases identical to the original, but there is absolutely no attribution to the author—remember, we must give credit where credit is due. When instructors read a paragraph like this in a student’s paper, they typically assume that this idea was the student’s original idea because of the lack of attribution. The preceding example is fairly blatant, but what about this one:

According to Price, plagiarism is not stable. What we think of as plagiarism shifts across historical time periods, across cultures, across workplaces, even across academic disciplines. We need to stop treating plagiarism like a pure moral absolute and start explaining it in a way that accounts for these shifting features of contexts (“Beyond ‘Gotcha,’” p. 90).

For this example, an instructor might consider this either unintentional plagiarism or just using a sloppy citation method. The example text does give credit where credit is due, which is good. However, after the first sentence almost everything else is a direct quote, and thus should be presented as a direct quote. Also, the typical APA citation style (author, year) is not followed, and that may be troublesome to instructors. Students should make sure they follow the citation style the instructor wants, not necessarily a style previously learned in another class.

Protecting Against Plagiarism

Students play a role in the prevention of plagiarism as well. Students need to (a) understand that intentional plagiarism harms their character, (b) that intentional plagiarism cheats themselves, and (c) that plagiarism is not a practice that is accepted as a trait of a well-rounded, educated citizen.

There are strategies to be followed that will help students avoid a charge of plagiarism should one occur. The strategies in *Tips & Tools: Avoiding Plagiarism* are adapted from Harris (2005), and they are excellent suggestions for protecting against charges of plagiarism.



Tips & Tools: Avoiding Plagiarism

1. Protect your data and your computer passwords to protect against theft.
2. Do not lend, give, or upload any paper—even if a student just wants to “see” what an APA-formatted paper looks like.
3. Report any theft immediately, including the proper authorities, and in the case of academic work, your instructors.
4. Save and print all drafts and notes—especially having paper or electronic notes will help support the originality of your written work.
5. Photocopy, print, or electronically archive all of your sources—and do not cite something that you have not actually read yourself.
6. Be proactive in seeking out the advice of your instructor and/or teaching assistants. If someone has been reviewing your work all semester, it will be easier for you to make the case that your work is actually your work.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating with serious consequences. Many instructors agree with Harris (2005) when he stated, “The goal of education is not to get through, but to get better” (p. 15). If students intend on cheating their way through college, why bother? Think about the ultimate ramifications—as a society, do we want our loved ones to go to the hospital for a surgical procedure by someone who cheated his or her way through medical school? What about seeking advice from a lawyer who cheated throughout law school, or a therapist who cheated during graduate school? Plagiarism and cheating have the potential to be harmful to others and ourselves.

Sometimes students become frustrated with the necessity for citation, and when they look at their completed APA-style manuscripts, they see citations all over the place. They wonder, where is the creativity if the research paper is about everyone else’s ideas? The creativity in the social sciences is in the combination of ideas, that is, how *the writer* put the ideas together. When a student observes trends in the literature or identifies common threads across different areas of social science, that’s creative. The creativity comes in the combinations of new ideas, or the development of a new method to test a hypothesis, or an innovative approach to understanding an age-old problem. Social scientists are highly creative (think back to the journal article topics that opened Chapter 3), but they also highly value the intellectual property of others, which is why they are so careful to give credit where credit is due and avoid plagiarism. Roig (2008) articulated the importance of ethical writing this way:

Clear and effective writing is critical to academic success, and it is one of the most valued skills in the modern workplace. However, whether it is being used for academic or professional purposes, writing must not only be mechanically sound, clear, and persuasive, it must also be accurate and, above all, honest” (p. 33).

Chapter Summary

Scholarly writing requires the skilled creation of new work products that add to our collective knowledge about behaviors, groups, and cultures as well as demonstrates the thinking and cognitive abilities of the writer. Successful writing in the social sciences is a complex task wherein a number of potential pitfalls await. By fully using the note-taking method presented in this chapter (either in analog/paper form or digitally), writers can systematically track ideas—both the source of the idea and the idea itself. This methodology provides a number of advantages, one being that the analysis of ideas is facilitated, and by dealing with ideas individually, higher-order synthesis is achieved in a more parallel form. Another advantage of meticulously tracking ideas and sources is the avoidance of improper misattributions, such as confusions between common knowledge and knowledge that needs to be cited. Finally, adherence to the suggestions offered in this chapter can help students minimize the risk of plagiarism, which is essentially the theft of the work of others, whether that theft is fraudulent (intentional) or unintentional.

Questions for Critical Thinking

- What is the big deal about plagiarizing someone else's work? It is unlikely that the other person would ever know that their work was borrowed without permission. What harm is there in taking the work of someone else and claiming it as your own?
- In reality, how does one determine whether something is "common knowledge" or not? How does a scholar differentiate between an idea read about or heard about, and that same idea but with a twist that is an original creation? Can one protect the intellectual property rights of an idea? Is an idea copyrightable, trademark-able, or patentable? How might you feel if someone stole your ideas, such as a research paper that was created from scratch?
- Do you think you will ever actually use the notecard method? Of course it might be used if it was required by an instructor—but otherwise, does it appear useful? Do you have some form of the notecard method that is in current use? What parts of your present method are superior to the notecard method, and what tips or techniques from the notecard method (if any) can any student use to improve one's method for conducting systematic research?

Concept Check

1. When using a direct quote in writing in APA style, which of the following must appear with the text of your quotation?
 - a. the city or state where published
 - b. the book or journal article title
 - c. the author's first name or initials
 - d. the page or paragraph number

2. Borrowing the intellectual property of someone else's writing without proper attribution of the source (that is, the author) is known as
 - a. plagiarism.
 - b. misattribution.
 - c. confabulation.
 - d. replication
3. A/An _____ is a translation of the writer's original words to your own words, of approximate length as the original source material.
 - a. annotation
 - b. paraphrase
 - c. summary
 - d. appendix
4. A/An _____ is a translation of the writer's original words to your own words, but shorter than the original source material.
 - a. annotation
 - b. paraphrase
 - c. summary
 - d. appendix
5. As described in this chapter, which of the following would appear on a reference notecard?
 - a. a paraphrase of the author's original ideas
 - b. an annotation that describes the work's importance
 - c. the names of the authors of the cited work
 - d. a direct quotation that includes a page or paragraph number

Answers: 1) d, 2) a, 3) b, 4) c, 5) d

Web Links

This website provides good tips for taking research notes: http://www.clark.edu/Library/iris/start/research_notes/research_notes.shtml

This website offers more help for tips about APA references and citation style: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

This website gives details on how to recognize plagiarism: <https://www.indiana.edu/~istd/examples.html>

This website describes the consequences of plagiarism: <http://mail.baylorschool.org/~jstover/plagiarism/consequences.htm>

This website chronicles some of the top plagiarism scandals of all time: <http://www.onlineclasses.org/2009/10/21/top-10-plagiarism-scandals-of-all-time/>

Key Terms

intentional plagiarism Purposely claiming ideas of others as your own without proper credit.

notecard method A technique using 3 x 5- and 4 x 6-inch lined notecards where students can organize the reference materials and ideas needed to write a term paper that includes appropriate levels of analysis and synthesis.

plagiarism Claiming the ideas of others as your own without providing proper attributional credit.

unintentional plagiarism Sloppiness or misunderstandings on the writer's behalf that leads to the use of others' ideas without proper attribution.

