Deterring Academic Dishonesty: Working Habits that Work

1. Take complete and careful notes. Whatever note-taking system you use, make sure to distinguish carefully between any words and ideas from your source and your own words and ideas. When copying passages verbatim from a source; make sure to use quotation marks and to be precise about recording the page number(s) of the source. You'll save yourself time and aggravation if you take complete and accurate notes the first time around. Students often get into trouble because their notes are incomplete or confused, and they run out of time to go back to check their sources.

2. **Keep all of your notes** until after you have had your graded papers returned to you. If any question is raised about your work, it's to your advantage to be able to produce your notes and preliminary drafts of your papers.

3. **Be thorough in drafting and checking your papers** to make sure all words borrowed from your sources are placed in quotation marks or indented and that all ideas and necessary information that require citation are followed by a footnote or parenthetical citation.

4. **If you do all of your work on a computer — from note-taking to drafts to final version — be especially careful.** The ease with which text can be copied and pasted, moved around, and edited on a computer can make the work of writing a paper quicker and more efficient, but it can also lead to serious errors. A good practice is to keep your note files distinct from the file in which you're writing your paper. In your note file, clearly label any quotations, and create your citations as you go — for both quotations and other kinds of references to source material. Too often quotation marks and citations can get lost or confused in the drafting and revision process; don't rely on your memory or on incomplete notes in the final stages of writing. Instead of cutting and pasting from your note files to your paper file, use the "copy and paste" function so that your original note files remain intact. If you move a phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph from your notes into your paper, be certain to move any quotation marks and the citation.

Keep track of the file names of the various drafts of your papers so that you don't confuse them in the final rush to print and submit your work. Sloppy work habits and the pressure of deadlines are not valid defenses if you're charged with plagiarism or another violation. It's also a good idea to print out a hard copy of your work periodically and to back up your files in order to avoid a crisis if your computer fails. Develop a sensible plan to keep track of your work on the computer and stick to it.

6. **Don't rely on a single secondary source** when doing a research paper. Be sure to find multiple sources that provide varying perspectives and draw different conclusions on your research topic. Your paper will be better if you respond to a variety of sources, and you'll avoid any possibility of depending so much on a single source that you can be charged with plagiarism.

7. Whenever possible, **show all of your work in problems sets** that require calculation.

8. **Be sure you understand the instructor's expectations and guidelines for collaborating** on assignments such as lab reports, problem sets, and research projects. If the rules for the course aren't explicit, do yourself (and your fellow students) a favor and ask the professor to clarify them.

9. Be extra careful to **verify the accuracy or validity of information obtained from electronic sources.** Be sure to cite such sources just as you would print sources.

10. If you're unsure whether or not to cite a source, ask your instructor. If that's not possible, follow the basic rule: **when in doubt, cite**.

11. **Be your own hardest critic.** Reread your papers to see how much is your own and how much is quotation, paraphrase, or summary from primary or secondary sources. If your paper is replete with ideas and quotations from your sources, are you confident that you've found some idea or thesis of your own to argue? Conversely, if there are few citations, have you done sufficient reading and research to be confident in your information and analysis?

12. Be sure you **understand your instructor's expectations for your work.** Are you supposed to be summarizing a source or analyzing it? Are you expected to go beyond the assigned readings? How many sources are you expected to use?

13. **Be cautious about using notes belonging to other students**, even if you're in the preliminary stage of writing your own paper or doing your own problem set. Keeping others' ideas distinct from your own is an important way to protect the integrity of your own academic work and to avoid unintended plagiarism.

14. **If you don't understand an assignment or need additional time to complete it, ask your instructor.** Out of desperation, students occasionally make the wrong choice by plagiarizing their sources rather than requesting an extension.

15. This last piece of advice is the hardest of all to follow: **Give yourself enough time to do your work well and carefully.** Proper citation takes time. Avoid last-minute rushes when the pressure of the due date may tempt you to get sloppy or cut corners just to finish. At 5 a.m. after an all-nighter, you may not be thinking clearly enough to make the right choices about properly acknowledging your sources, not to mention that you're unlikely to be doing your finest work at that hour.

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