Doing Honest Work in College

HOW TO PREPARE CITATIONS, AVOID PLAGIARISM, AND ACHIEVE REAL ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Third Edition

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CONTENTS

PART ONE  ACADEMIC HONESTY
1 The Three Principles of Academic Honesty  3
2 Academic Honesty from Your First Class to Your Final Exam  5
3 Taking Good Notes  35
4 Plagiarism and Academic Honesty  45

PART TWO  CITATIONS IN EVERY FORMAT: A QUICK GUIDE
5 The Basics of Citation  59
6 Chicago (or Turabian) Citations  65
7 MLA Citations for the Humanities  110
8 APA Citations for the Social Sciences, Education, and Business  139
9 CSE Citations for the Biological Sciences  169
10 AMA Citations for the Biomedical Sciences, Medicine, Nursing, and Dentistry  184
11 ACS Citations for Chemistry  192
12 Physics, Astrophysics, and Astronomy Citations  200
13 Mathematics, Computer Science, and Engineering Citations  206
14 FAQs about All Reference Styles  219

Thanks  231
Index  233
Academic honesty boils down to three simple but powerful principles:

• When you say you did the work yourself, you actually did it.
• When you rely on someone else’s work, you cite it. When you use their words, you quote them openly and accurately, and you cite them too.
• When you present research materials, you present them fairly and truthfully. That’s true whether the research involves data, documents, or the writings of other scholars.

These are bedrock principles, easy to remember and follow. They apply to all your classes, labs, papers, and exams. They cover everything from English papers to chemistry experiments, from computer codes to architectural drawings. They apply to everyone in the university, from first-year students to professors. They’re not just principles for students. They’re principles for academic honesty across the entire university.

Of course each university has its own code of conduct, and each class its own rules for specific assignments. In the next chapter I’ll discuss these detailed rules and explain how to follow them in papers, labs, study groups, and exams.

I’ll also discuss how to use the internet properly for assignments and what you can—and cannot—do with your laptop and cell phone on those assignments and exams. I’ll show you how to cite websites, social media, and podcasts as well as books, articles, poems, films, and many other types of sources. With this brief book you can avoid plagiarism and handle nearly every citation you’ll ever do, from computer science to visual arts.

Speaking of sciences, what about honesty in study groups and labs? That can be confusing because you sometimes work with fellow students and
sometimes by yourself. What exactly are you supposed to do on your own, without any help? I’ll pass along useful advice from lab supervisors, who explain how to use study groups effectively and how to avoid any problems.

On all these issues, I’ll report on conversations with deans of students. They deal with academic honesty every day and know the issues well. Believe me, it’s a lot better to read their advice here than to have them explain it to you privately! That is a meeting you do not want to have.

The most important advice is to listen to your professors’ rules for each assignment, ask for clarification if you’re unsure, and then follow the three basic principles: If you say you did this work, then you really did it. If you quoted others or used their research, you acknowledge it openly. If you say the data or lab experiment came out a particular way, then it really did. Never make up data, hide bad results, or present others’ work as your own.

The most basic point is this: your work should be presented fairly and honestly. Don’t misrepresent your findings or anyone else’s. Don’t misrepresent their ideas. Don’t misrepresent the paper or exam as solely your own if you relied on someone else. Give credit where it is due. In a paper, cite your sources. In an exam, do the work yourself.

If you follow this straightforward advice, you’ll stay on the right side of your university’s rules and meet the highest standards of academic integrity. You will actually learn the material, and your grades will be honestly earned.

Now let’s get down to nuts and bolts.