Authoritative References

When writing a term paper or any official report, inclusion of *authoritative* reference citations is essential. The references give the reader confidence that you have "done your homework" in preparing the report, they show how your results and conclusions fit within the established work of others, and they allow the interested reader to find sources of additional in-depth information.

Authoritative references are **archival**, **corroborated**, and **sanctioned**.

> *Archival* means that the source is currently available, accessible by the public, and expected to remain available in the future. This would apply to books and magazines in a public library, official government documents, and bona fide electronic document repositories, such as the on-line research archives of academic institutions or professional organizations.
>
> *Corroborated* means that the information appears in at least two separate and reliable sources, such as a magazine article by one author and the matching information in a research monograph by another author. Corroboration does not guarantee accuracy, but it helps prevent published errors—either accidental or intentional—from leading you astray.
>
> *Sanctioned* indicates that the information is from a trustworthy and reputable source, such as a professionally published reference book, a professional society magazine, a scholarly peer-reviewed journal, or a similar source that is known to have reliable fact-checking procedures in place.

It is best to use a balance of different bibliographic references, like three taken from scholarly media and three from industry sources.

Web sites and blogs that are user-altered or frequently changed cannot be considered archival, so they cannot be used as authoritative references. Wikipedia is a significant example of a useful but *non-authoritative* source: the articles can be changed at any time, there is no guarantee of corroboration, and the contents are not sanctioned by any official and trustworthy source. So, by all means go ahead and use Wikipedia and similar sites as you begin your literature search, but you should not *cite* the information from Wikipedia in your term paper or official report. Instead, use the links and leads typically found in Wikipedia articles to help you find and cite the *authoritiative* sources.

Authoritative examples:
- An article in a published textbook or bona fide reference book.
- A peer-reviewed engineering or scientific journal.
- A textbook from a reputable publisher such as Wiley, Prentice-Hall, McGraw Hill, etc.
- A article published in Time Magazine or a similar nationally distributed news magazine.
- The official web site of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (www.nist.gov)

Questionable examples that probably aren't *authoritative* by definition:

- Unreviewed documents from self-published web repositories (blogs, wiki sites, political sites, Facebook, Pinterest, commercial advertising, etc.).
- Material received via uncorroborated email, via hearsay, or statements solely in oral form.
- Letters to the editor, opinion essays, and other informal personal communication items.
- Videos, books, web sites, or handbills intended to promote a deliberately controversial, decidedly partisan, offensive, or inflamatory viewpoint.

Proper reference citations:

Please use a consistent format for all cited references, such as the MLA style guide or another standard source. Order the references by the first author's last name, or use some other consistent approach (order of citation, chronological order of publication, etc.). If the item is anonymous (no author), start the entry with the title. The reference citation MUST give sufficient information for a reader to access that document.

A few examples:

> Book: [AUTHORS. <u>TITLE</u>. PLACE: PUBLISHER, DATE.]
> Lewis, George, and Sylvia Grayson. <u>A Big Red Example Book</u>. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1975.

> Journal: [AUTHORS. "ARTICLE TITLE." <u>JOURNAL TITLE</u> VOLUME (DATE): PAGES]
> Jones, Sue, Steve Bent, and Shirley Ficus. "Building Tall, Building Small." <u>Chronicles of Montana</u> 21.4 (2001): 49-56.

> Website: [AUTHORS. "DOC TITLE." SITE NAME. DOC DATE. SITE SPONSOR. ACCESS DATE URL]
> Maher, Robert. "ENGR125CS Syllabus." <u>Technology, Innovation, and Society</u> Course. 2010. Montana State University. 5 Nov. 2016 < http://www.montana.edu/rmaher/engr125/syllabus.html>.

NOTE that many publications have specific style guides and cited reference formats, so refer to those guides if you are preparing a paper for journal publication.

Avoiding plagiarism

Plagiarism is an act of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism can be deliberate or inadvertent, but it is never tolerable or excusable.

All original work, and especially original *academic* work, is based on creativity and insight that you, as author, provide for the benefit of yourself and your readers. Essentially all of your original work will be based in some way on the ideas and concepts that you develop by reading and understanding the original work of others, so it requires conscientious effort to distinguish between the words and ideas coming from *your own mind* and the words and ideas that you have *collected from others*.

When writing a term paper that is based on knowledge obtained from multiple sources, you will have a combination of concepts that you derive from particular sources, and those sources must be identified and cited in the text. This not only lets the reader know that you didn't invent the idea yourself, but also that the reader can go to that source to find out more information if desired. It

gives more credence to your written words because you are "backing up" the information with an authoritative reference. You will also be adding value by integrating, comparing, and contrasting the information you obtain from multiple sources. Your words teach a new and better understanding of the topic, not just reiterate the prior information.

Prior sources of information can be used in your paper in four basic ways: (i) quotation, (ii) facts and figures, (iii) summary/paraphrase, and (iv) where to go for more detail.

A quotation is a direct, verbatim copy. Only use a direct quotation if the exact words and context is vital to your presentation, such as a catchy quote by a recognized individual, or a definition of a newly coined phrase. The quote must be in quotation marks or as an indented paragraph. A complete citation of the sources is mandatory.

Facts are figures that come from a source can be important in your paper. If you obtain specific information, dates, data tables, etc., that are needed for your presentation, always include the full citation of where the information came from.

A summary or a paraphrase of some source means that you are using different words and phrases to convey an idea expressed by someone else. A summary is just that: a shorter version that captures the essence of an idea. A paraphrase may be a longer restatement that is used to match the style and terminology of the rest of the paper. In either case, it is essential to include a full citation of where the information came from.

Including additional key references lets the reader know where to go to get more complete and comprehensive information. In many cases the topic of your term paper will be treated by entire books, journals, research monographs, and so forth. It is simply not possible for your short paper to cover more than a few basic principles, and you can assist an interested reader by leaving good pointers to the comprehensive literature.

Avoid habits that lead to a higher risk for committing plagiarism

- Procrastinating
- "Writing" by cutting and pasting information from the Internet
- Starting a new paper by loading a prior paper to edit and tweak
- Skipping or just skimming essential reading
- Taking notes from several sources all on one page or mixed up over several pages
- Often forgetting to write down title, author, and other citation information
- Not wanting to admit you don't understand something
- Neglecting to ask for help from the instructor and other campus resources