



Citing Responsibly, Avoiding Plagiarism: An NPS Refresher



Citations make your research credible: they validate claims discussed in your writing, give credit where credit is due, and allow other researchers to follow in your footsteps. To determine if you need a citation, ask yourself the following questions as you write and revise:

- Do I know this information/data because I read it somewhere?
- Is this my own analysis based on my personal knowledge or research, or is it analysis I borrowed from another person or author?
- Is this knowledge the result of emails or conversations? (You still must cite unpublished information.)

You do not need to cite your own experience and findings, or common knowledge.

Common knowledge is something your readers already know. For example, “The average adult body contains about 250 grams of salt” or “George W. Bush served as president of the United States from 2000 to 2008.” As a rule of thumb, if you can find an unattributed fact in five credible sources, a citation is not needed. Consult a faculty member from your department or your reference librarian if you are unsure if something is field-specific common knowledge.

Include a citation or signal phrase when you borrow a source’s idea, statistic, or wording.

Your readers should understand which pieces of information came from which sources (cite!), and which are your original thoughts and data, or common knowledge (don’t cite).

One citation at the end of a paragraph typically cannot “cover” the entire paragraph.

Ensure the source is clear upfront and throughout the paragraph. A good rule of thumb is to cite the source completely *the first time it is used in each paragraph*. Then make it reasonably clear—using [signal phrases](#), sentence flow, and/or additional citations—that you are continuing to discuss information from the same source.

Differentiate between information that is paraphrased and information that is directly quoted.

Generally, a phrase that contains five or more consecutive words exactly as they appear in the source should appear in quotation marks (proper nouns and common language excluded) or be [paraphrased](#). Remember: whether you are paraphrasing or quoting source information, always cite it.

Try to limit direct quotations.

While quoting can be effective—and sometimes essential for precise wording—[paraphrasing](#) demonstrates your understanding of the topic and your critical thinking skills. Generally, the vast majority of your paper, around 90 percent, should be written in your own words rather than directly quoted from other sources.

The Graduate Writing Center and Thesis Processing Office can help!

Writing coaches and thesis processors can help you build your attribution skills. You may also ask a writing coach to run a draft paper through NPS’s plagiarism-detection software; the coach will meet with you to discuss problem areas and guide your revisions.

From the Naval Postgraduate School’s Graduate Writing Center and Thesis Processing Office, located in the Dudley Knox Library and online at <https://nps.edu/web/gwc> and <https://nps.edu/web/thesisprocessing>.

APA Style: Citing, Paraphrasing, and Quoting

To form a full APA citation, you must refer to both the **author** and **year** of the source.

To do so, use a mix of **signal phrases** and **parenthetical citations**. Signal phrases linking sentences to previously cited sources may be used in place of repeated citations. It must always be clear which pieces of information came from which sources. If a sentence is not cited or linked to a previous citation, the reader will assume it is your own original thought or finding as an author (or common knowledge).

Additionally, APA requires that citations for direct quotations contain **page numbers**. If there is no page number available, use a paragraph number, section title, or relevant indicator.

The most common, full citation is written parenthetically as Author, Year, Page Number(s):

(Smith, 2009, p. 17) or (Smith & Jones, 2009, pp. 17–18)

To avoid confusion, a good rule of thumb is to mention both the author and year—whether in the sentence text or parenthetically—with the first sentence in a paragraph that uses a source’s information. Remember that commas and periods fall *after* a parenthetical citation.

Here’s an example paragraph. The parenthetical in-text citations are highlighted in yellow, and the signal phrases are in blue. Note that the second sentence is common knowledge whereas the final sentence is the opinion of the author.

In a 2009 *Journal of Restaurant Marketing* article, restaurateur Shawna Jackson contends that a restaurant’s color scheme influences how hungry its patrons are. Consider popular fast-food restaurants, which often use red and yellow in their advertising and décor. According to a study by Roberta Chen and David Lopez (2016), restaurant customers feel energized in red and yellow environments, which encourages them to order more food. The same study indicates that patrons feel relaxed in blue and purple environments, which encourages them to “spend more time considering the menu options and eat at a slower pace” (p. 29). Although blue décor can give your restaurant a more casual, laid-back feel (Chen & Lopez, 2016), Jackson believes it encourages patrons to linger at their tables without ordering additional food or beverages. Accordingly, it is difficult to identify a popular chain restaurant that decorates with calmer hues.

Visit libguides.nps.edu/citation/apa for more information and reference examples.