



## Office of Learning Resources

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### **Researching with the Web: How to Avoid Internet Plagiarism**

*By a Penn student*

It's 3 A.M. You've been working all day, weary from the 4 hours of sleep you got last night. Your 10-page paper is nearing completion, but it's absolutely saturated with all the information you could find, and you couldn't possibly think up an entirely new paragraph without getting a massive headache. All you need is one more paragraph. You have some great information from a website you found earlier that evening. You copy and paste and don't think twice—you'll change the paper around in the morning. At least now you can finally enjoy the sweet comfort of sleep. The next morning, waking up late, you leap out of bed, print whatever you have, not having time to proofread or edit. You're just glad to turn in your last paper of the semester. And you're fine with a "B."

Many of you have probably used the ol' "copy and paste" research method before. Considering how easy it is for teachers to determine if your work is plagiarized, you're lucky if you haven't been caught. There's a reason it's called "the web." Certainly, it is one of the most useful tools to grace college students in their search for knowledge, but it's also a sticky one. Even if you have no intentions of plagiarizing, you can still get into trouble for improper citation or referencing of sources. You must be on alert for that giant, hairy, hungry spider of plagiarism.

To avoid Internet plagiarism:

**Start your paper early.** Many times plagiarism results from procrastination or poor time management. Mark your paper due dates on your calendar right away, so you can see ahead in the semester. Instead of writing your paper the night before, do it in little pieces or sections. Set aside an adequate amount of time for proofreading and editing. Set goals to finish certain parts of your paper by certain dates, and keep up to speed. The amount of stress avoided at the end will be worth it.

**Keep a list of the web sites you visit.** Mark down all the sites relevant to your paper. Keep a hard copy of references as well as a disk copy to be safe. You can also use the "book-marking" feature of many web browsers to help keep track of the sites you use.

**Highlight direct quotes in your draft.** Document programs like Microsoft Word include a highlighting function that highlights typed text. If you don't want to disturb your thought progression, highlight referenced text and come back to it later on in order to make sure everything is properly documented.

**Learn how to cite properly using your discipline's manual of style.** Different disciplines use different styles for citing references. For example, English typically uses MLA whereas psychology uses APA. Ask your professors what manual of style they prefer and use the appropriate rules when documenting sources in your papers.

Before handing in your paper, **cross-reference your citations** with the actual sources. Make sure your references match up correctly and that you use proper citation techniques. Re-read your paper. If anything seems like it may not have come directly from your own thinking, do a search to make sure.

Here are some **helpful web sites** that include proper citation examples and methods:

- [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx\\_basic.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx_basic.html)  
Provides lots of helpful examples of proper citation for everything from e-mails to video games.
- <http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/cite5.html>  
Includes extensive examples on how to cite many different types of electronic sources. Includes good and easy-to-understand description of MLA style.
- [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r\\_evalsource4.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_evalsource4.html)  
A good site for evaluating information on the web.
- <http://www.cyberbee.com/citing.html>  
Provides citing examples of electronic sources.
- <http://www.academicintegrity.org/>  
Site devoted to promotion of academic integrity among students worldwide.