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3 How can students properly include proof of books and other
4 sources and how can they better focus their writing? I would like to help
5 writers of English to better develop research papers and to avoid the risk
6 of plagiarism. What exactly is plagiarism and how can it undermine a
7 paper?

8

9 There are two kinds of plagiarism. On the one hand it can mean
10 copying material one to one from web-pages, books or other sources; on
11 the other hand it happens if the writer provides no clear references within
12 paragraphs for the sources he or she used. This happened to me.
13 Granted, you may have to use the same vocabulary as others did, but it
14 is every writer's challenge to create phrases and sentences that do not
15 resemble those already been written. Students must show that they have
16 got their own creative writing style and that there's no need to copy the
17 style of other research papers. The *Hodge's Harbrace Handbook (HHH)*
18 clearly mentions: "Ensure that your audience can distinguish between
19 the ideas of other writers and your own contributions." (p. 546) What do
20 writers have to credit?

21

22 The HHH reveals that only “common knowledge” does not need
23 any credit. What is common knowledge? We are talking about well-
24 known facts or events that the average reader has probably heard about.
25 (HHH, p.546) For example, in my paper I wrote: “Ships from Europe
26 have carried African slaves across the Atlantic Ocean for two and a half
27 centuries...African slaves were forced to work on plantations to produce
28 coffee, rice, tobacco, cotton and sugar.” This is considered to be
29 common knowledge and you don’t have to desperately search for a
30 suitable source.

31
32 But, most of the information you want to present is “uncommon
33 knowledge.” In this case you need documentation; you need to prove
34 where you’ve learned this particular detail. My sentence reads: “To
35 discourage rebellion and to keep their slaves in check, owners
36 administered degrading physical punishment for even minor offences.”
37 Who told you this fact? Who is responsible for this statement? The lack
38 of a source is simply called plagiarism. If you yourself draw conclusions
39 from common and uncommon knowledge, you surely don’t have to credit
40 it, but you do need to explicitly express the conclusion as your opinion.

41
42 It is wise to heed the HHH’s warning: If you present someone
43 else’s ideas as your own, it is close to criminal behaviour – called piracy

44 or plagiarism. (p. 547) You risk failure, although your paper could be
45 worth reading and although you did lots of research. Even if you present
46 your own words and sentences, they are often not your own ideas and
47 judgements. Documentation becomes necessary. Without, a paper might
48 be nice to read, but it is useless regarding its academic purpose. How do
49 you scrupulously refer to a source?

50

51 It is your choice, either to “quote with documentation” or to
52 “paraphrase with documentation.” (HHH, p. 547,548) To identify the
53 author’s original name supports your accuracy and establishes the
54 source. Moreover, the usage of “attributive tags” ascribes weight to the
55 following information of a source. (HHH, p. 540) Referring to my
56 exemplary sentence:

57

58 - quote with documentation:

59 David B. Davis, an expert on slavery studies, claims that “owners
60 administered degrading physical punishment for even minor offences, to
61 discourage rebellion and to keep their slaves in check.” (p. 125)

62

63 - paraphrase with documentation:

64 An expert on slavery studies, argues that owners discouraged
65 rebellion and that they kept their slaves in check by making use of

66 degrading physical punishment, even for minor offences. (Davis, p. 125)
67 (An exact citation must be mentioned in your bibliography.)

68

69 When you are in doubt if to cite a sentence or not; by all means cite
70 it and you are on the safe side. Once you have presented and cited a
71 source responsibly, you can concentrate on responding to it. (HHH,
72 p.539)

73

74 A second point that aids you to make your paper an up-to-date
75 piece of academic work is the currency of your sources. “Useful sources
76 are also timely.” (p. 528) The ultimate ambition is: Look at the date of a
77 book’s publication and primarily use sources that are current. (HHH,
78 p.549) In most cases, a reasonable number of books for a specific topic
79 is available. You cannot generalise, but research usually develops and
80 changes within years and decades. Information and especially statistics
81 can quickly become out-of-date. My suggestion is: Rather exclude an old
82 source and concentrate on recent material, unless you have good reason
83 to include an older publication. (see p. 528, “timeliness”) For example,
84 you may want to reveal that a conclusion taken from an older source is
85 out-dated or you want to point out the difference to current research and
86 the reason why it went out-of-date.

87

88 How can you better stick to the topic of your research paper? The
89 Harbrace Handbook provides fantastic hints that help you to stay
90 coherent in your sentences, your paragraphs and your introduction and
91 conclusion. Are you often inclined to refer to historical knowledge? That
92 is brilliant, though you shouldn't ignore that Anglo-American Studies
93 predominantly is no history course.

94

95 What happened to me is that I completely got astray in historical
96 details of slavery and lost the link-up to the present day situation of
97 Blacks. I managed to hit the road, but much too late and furthermore, I
98 produced a split research paper. The first two thirds of my paper present
99 historical details, the final third covers the situation of Blacks today.

100

101 A wonderful way to connect both aspects is to refer to our day right
102 at the beginning and to combine today's reality and facts with historical
103 ones. It helps you to make plain the relevance of historical facts you want
104 to share and it helps you to steadily focus your topic plus your
105 conclusion.

106

107 An exemplary paragraph could read as the following:

108

109 *David B. Davis, an expert on slavery studies, claims that “owners*
110 *administered degrading physical punishment for even minor offences, to*
111 *discourage rebellion and to keep their slaves in check.” (p. 125) Are*
112 *Blacks kept in check today as well? The number of black prison inmates,*
113 *especially in Southern US states, outnumbers that of white inmates.*
114 *(source should be added) It is in no relation to the percentage of black*
115 *and white people living in these states. This fact points out that, as it was*
116 *in former times, when Whites denied Blacks their rights and freedom,*
117 *Blacks still have to fight against a persisting devil-may-care attitude and*
118 *a rejecting attitude towards Black people in general, who are easy to*
119 *suspect.*

120

121 Finally, if you are writing about the situation of e.g. Blacks, do not
122 swap to the situation of another minority. You may mention other groups,
123 but you must not dedicate a whole paragraph to them. It simply confuses
124 your readers. Having written these pages, I learned much about
125 scrupulous research and other crucial methods writers should obey in
126 order to write an acceptable and academic paper.

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