**Incorporating Sources Fairly and Properly, Avoiding Plagiarism**

**Overview**: MLA is the format you’ll use in English classes, but be prepared to learn other systems based on the expectations of the audience and the forum. It’s all part of establishing your credibility as a writer. Below I’ve included the most basic principles, but if you don’t know this system, consult your grammar handbook or the Web, e.g.: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/mla.html>

1. Never hang a quote in your paragraph all by itself. Always use a “signal phrase” or “identifying tag” to tell your reader where the idea or quotation is from, and choose the phrase carefully for clarity and grace. Examples of signal phrases: “According to one historian,” “Mary Tannen argues,” “One recent study shows.”
2. For the formal academic citing systems (MLA, APA, etc.) the in-text citations must be paired with a works cited page or they mean nothing. If you don’t know how this works, look it up or ask. For informal citing, as in newspapers, the source must be identified in the text, as part of the signal phrase or in a separate sentence. Use the citation system appropriate for your forum.
3. You must give credit for other people’s words or ideas, even if you are only summarizing or paraphrasing. Generally, you want to summarize and paraphrase if it is only the idea or information you want, not the exact wording of the source. This allows you to shape and mold the argument more gracefully and be more concise. If you are using their exact words--even just a few if the language is unusual—you must use quotation marks. Be sure to get the quote exactly.
4. Be careful to change the language completely if you are paraphrasing; don’t just juggle the word order a little and change a word here and there.
5. Take notes carefully so you will be able to give credit where it is due. If you summarize or paraphrase in your notes, change the language completely. In your notes, be clear on what is from whom. For long projects, note cards and bibliography cards are a good idea.
6. Don’t let your sources steal the show. You need to have enough support from your sources to be credible, but not so much from your sources that they take over your paper. Your research qualifies you to contribute your own reasoned judgment to the debate.
7. If you aren’t sure about citing a source, ASK! In college you are expected to know how to avoid plagiarism, and you will be held responsible for it, even if you claim ignorance of the rules. Penalties can be severe. See this website for details: <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/S04-12.pdf>

For further details, see your handbook or the SJSU Writing Center website:

home: <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter/>