According to the UBC Library How to Cite guide, citations, aka, *references* give credit to others for their work but do you know when to cite and why it’s so important?

In theory, it’s really straightforward. You must cite: when you use someone else’s words or their ideas and sometimes you even have to cite yourself.

That sounds clear enough, but can be a bit confusing in practice. Let’s look at some specific examples:

- if you directly quote another person – whether their work appeared in print, online or even if you heard it in person you have to cite their words
- if you patch a series of quotations together it’s not considered original work – you’ll need to cite all those quotes.
- re-writing someone else’s words or summarizing their ideas, known as paraphrasing, isn’t original work – so again, you’ll need to cite your sources
- and yes, you really do have to cite yourself if you use words or ideas from previous papers or projects. Do check with your instructor first though – many instructors do not permit students to use past work in their current assignments.

So you may be asking yourself – do I have to cite every word in my paper? Fortunately not! You don’t have to cite statements of general knowledge. General knowledge is generally defined as the type of facts that you can expect the average person to know, such as “the sky is blue” or the name of your mayor.

You also don’t have to cite your own original words and ideas – but beware the perils of bad record-keeping. When you get deeply involved in your research it can sometimes be difficult to remember that one of your brilliant ideas actually came from someone else. So, be meticulous about keeping track of your sources and inspiration right from the first day you begin your research.

This is all really important because the consequences for failing to cite properly can be severe. Claiming another person’s work as your own – even by accident -is a type of intellectual theft called *plagiarism*; violates UBC’s standards for academic honesty; and prevents your readers from being able to track down your sources.

If you have any questions about how and when to cite you can check out the How to Cite guide in the Library’s research help portal or contact a Librarian. You can also find everything you need to know about the University’s standards for academic honesty in the UBC Calendar in the policies and regulations section.