

Avoiding Plagiarism

What Is Plagiarism?

Many students are under the impression that “plagiarism” is copying someone else’s words and using them as your own. While this is plagiarism, it is far from the only type. Plagiarism is using someone’s ideas (not just their words), whether intentionally or unintentionally, without providing proper citation.

Avoiding Plagiarism

In order to avoid inadvertently plagiarizing, cite your source(s) whenever you:

- Use another person’s ideas or opinions
- Paraphrase another person’s spoken or written words
- Use a direct quote of another person’s spoken or written words
- Refer to facts or historical events that are not common knowledge

To Cite, or Not To Cite?

To put this into practice, read over each passage and determine whether or not the author needs to cite their sources in order to avoid plagiarism. If the author does need to cite her sources, how should she do so? Then, turn this worksheet over for an explanation of the correct answer.

- A. Charlotte Brontë took up the first of many positions as a governess in 1839.
- B. Charlotte Brontë did not enjoy her career as a governess; she felt constantly humiliated by her employers and often complained that she was treated like a slave.
- C. At their home in West Yorkshire, young Charlotte Brontë acted as “the motherly friend and guardian of her younger sisters.”
- D. At their home in West Yorkshire, young Charlotte Brontë served as a motherly figure and acted as a guardian of her younger sisters.
- E. Charlotte Brontë, like other Victorian female writers, was confined in her writing by the necessity of making her female characters embody the archetypes of either the pure angel or the rebellious monster.

Answers Explained

Note: citations in this section are given in MLA 8 format.

A. The author would NOT need to cite a source for this, as it is a historical fact that the writer Charlotte Brontë's first position as a governess was in 1839. Even if the reader or the author themselves did not previously know this, it is a documentable fact in the historical record.

B. The author WOULD need to cite a source for this. While it is a historical fact that Charlotte Brontë was a governess, her feelings of being humiliated by her employers and her complaints of being treated like a slave cannot be verified by the historical record. These claims need to be backed up by a proper citation, providing the source where the author found information about Brontë's feelings regarding her employment as a governess, *The Brontës A-Z* by Lisa Paddock and Carl Rollyson:

Charlotte Brontë did not enjoy her career as a governess; she felt constantly humiliated by her employers and often complained that she was treated like a slave (Paddock and Rollyson 29).

C. The author WOULD need to cite a source for this, as this passage contains a direct quote of another person's words—in this case, the written words of John Cousin in *A Short Biographical Dictionary of English Literature*. To fix this, the author would need to identify Cousin as the writer of those words, like so:

At their home in West Yorkshire, young Charlotte Brontë acted as "the motherly friend and guardian of her younger sisters" (Cousin 20).

D. The author WOULD need to cite a source for this, as this passage is paraphrasing John Cousin's written words in *A Short Biographical Dictionary of English Literature*. Although the author is not quoting Cousin's words directly, she is referring to what he wrote, and should cite him as her source:

At their home in West Yorkshire, young Charlotte Brontë served as a motherly figure and acted as a guardian of her younger sisters (Cousins 20).

E. The author WOULD need to cite a source for this, as this passage is summarizing another person's opinion (in this case, a feminist reading of Victorian works, including Brontë's *Jane Eyre*). Since the author herself did not come up with this theory, she will need to cite the source, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's book *The Madwoman in the Attic*:

In their groundbreaking 1979 work *The Madwoman in the Attic*, literary scholars Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar theorize Charlotte Brontë, like other Victorian female writers, was confined in her writing by the necessity of making her female characters embody the archetypes of either the pure angel or the rebellious monster.

Further Resources

Valencia's guides to MLA, APA, and Chicago:

<https://valenciacollege.edu/students/library/mla-apa-chicago-guides/>

Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) citation guides:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html

TurnItIn.Com's Plagiarism Spectrum: <https://www.turnitin.com/static/plagiarism-spectrum/>

This guide will walk you through the ten most common types of plagiarism, including some that you may not be aware of.

Indiana University's Plagiarism Guide: <https://wts.indiana.edu/writing-guides/plagiarism.html>

This resource from Indiana University's Writing Tutorial Services explains different types of plagiarism, particularly the difference between an acceptable paraphrase and a plagiarized paraphrase, and provides numerous strategies for avoiding plagiarism.