

When to Cite

Objectives

Many people are unclear about when you need to cite sources as you are writing a paper.

In this video, we'll see when you need to cite and when you don't.

To do this, we'll give you a couple of questions with different scenarios.

For each one, read through the scenario and think about whether you need to cite the source or not.

Scenario Questions

Question 1

The original source:

Canadians, though, can't be smug. We fare no better than the U.S. The break and enter rates in Victoria and Regina rank within the top 10% of all American cities.

Your sentence:

Surprisingly high Canadian crime rates led Macleans reporters to conclude that "we fare no better than the U.S."

Should you cite? Yes or no.

Answer 1

Yes, you need to cite this source. You always need a citation when you quote word for word.

You always need to use quotation marks when you use someone else's words.

Question 2

The original source:

Canadians, though, can't be smug. We fare no better than the U.S. The break and enter rates in Victoria and Regina rank within the top 10% of all American cities.

Your sentence:

Canadians don't do much better than the U.S. when it comes to crime.

Should you cite? Yes or no.

Answer 2

Yes, you need to cite this source. You always need to cite information or ideas that you got from somewhere else, even if you are summarizing or putting it in your own words.

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Question 3

Your sentence:

Regina's break-in rate is among the top 10% of Canadian and American cities.

Should you cite? Yes or no.

Answer 3

Yes, you need to cite this. Always cite your source for facts, unless those facts are common knowledge (which this one is not).

Question 4

You read a Wikipedia article on crime in Canada as background information before you start researching and writing your paper.

Should you cite? Yes or no.

Answer 4

It depends. If you use ideas you got from Wikipedia in your paper, you need to cite it.

If you only use Wikipedia as background to start your research, and don't use ideas you get from it, you don't need to cite it.

Question 5

You find an image online of crime in Regina and include it in your paper.

Should you cite? Yes or no.

Answer 5

Yes, you need to cite the source. You need to cite where you got the image, just like you do for quotes or ideas. Otherwise you imply that you created it yourself, which is plagiarism. If you did create it, you don't need to cite it.

Question 6

Your sentence:

All Canadian cities have serious problems with crime. Kitchener-Waterloo is no exception.

Should you cite? Yes or no.

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Answer 6

It depends. If this is an argument you are presenting in your paper, and you are backing it up immediately afterwards with sources you cite, then no. If you are just claiming this as a fact, you do need to cite - it isn't common knowledge.

Question 7

You are giving a class presentation about crime in Canadian cities and talk about break-in rates in Regina.

Should you cite? Yes or no.

Answer 7

Yes, you need to cite your source.

You need to cite sources for presentations too. Often people do this in a slide at the end.

In this video, the facts and quotes are all from:

MacQueen, K. (2008). The most dangerous cities in Canada. *Macleans*, March 12.

Summary

Let's summarize.

What we've seen is that you need to cite sources when you quote, when you put someone else's ideas in your own words, when you use facts that aren't common knowledge, and when you use images, charts or other content you didn't create yourself.

You don't need to cite a source for facts that are common knowledge.

You also don't need to cite your own arguments, though you should always back them up with sources you do cite.

The main rule of thumb in citing is: if in doubt, cite.

It is always better to cite when you don't need to than not cite when you should.

More help

For more information on citing, check out our related video, How to Cite.

It is available at library.wlu.ca/help/tutorials.

If you have any questions, ask us at library.wlu.ca/help/askus.