**Research Documentation**

**1-Choosing a Documentation Format:**

As a rule, your assignments requiring research will specify a documentation format. If you are free to use the style of your choice, you can choose any format you want as long as you are consistent, but you should know that certain disciplines tend to use specific documentation styles:

 business and social sciences: American Psychological Association (APA)

 natural and applied sciences: Council of Science Editors (CSE)

 humanities: Modern Language Association (MLA) or the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)

These three systems of documentation have been refined over many generations so that academics can rely on certain standards of attribution when they cite each other’s work and when their work is cited. When you enter into an academic conversation in a given discipline, it’s imperative that you play by its rules. It’s true that popular, nonacademic forms of attribution exist. Making a link to another website in a blog or a Twitter post works quite well, but in an academic context, such a form of attribution is not sufficient. Of course it should go without saying that stealing someone else’s words or borrowing them without attribution, whether you do it casually on the web or in an academic context, is simply wrong.

**.2 Integrating Sources:**

Your goal within a research paper is to integrate other sources smoothly into your paper to support the points you are making. As long as you give proper credit, you can ethically reference anyone else’s work. You should not, however, create a paper that is made up of one reference after another without any of your input. You should also avoid using half-page or whole-page quotations. Make sure to write enough of your material so that your sources are integrated into your work rather than making up the bulk of your paper.

Think of yourself as a kind of museum docent or tour guide when you are integrating sources into your work. You’ll usually want to take some time to set up your use of a source by placing it in a proper context. That’s why in most cases, before you even launch into quotation, paraphrase, or summary, you will have probably already used what’s called a “signal phrase” that identifies the author of the source, and often the specific publication (whether web or print) from which it is taken. After your use of the source, you’ll need to follow up with analysis and commentary on how you think it fits into the larger context of your argument.