What is Plagiarism?

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines plagiarize as “to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own; to use (another’s production) without crediting the source.”

Quotation marks, as in the above sentence, and the source’s name (The Merriam-Webster Dictionary) are used to show that the words and ideas that define plagiarize are not the writer’s own creation. The work and words belong to another individual. Just as you would not want your words or ideas stolen, so must you respect the work and words of other people. Plagiarism can lead to serious academic consequences.

What if I reword the idea?
Writers sometimes use synonyms of words to avoid copying a thought word for word, but this is not enough. Even if you paraphrase an idea using your own style and language, you still need to acknowledge that the idea was not yours. If you paraphrase or summarize someone else’s thought, you do not need to use quotation marks, but you must attribute the thought to the original author.

What’s the difference between quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing?

• Quoting
Here’s an example of a quote. Paul Krugman, a New York Times columnist, wrote, “Greater Atlanta has roughly the same population as Greater Berlin — but Berlin is a city of trains, buses and bikes, while Atlanta is a city of cars, cars and cars.” In this example, we are using the author’s exact words.

• Paraphrasing
To paraphrase is to take someone else’s thought and put it into your own words. Suppose that we wrote the following sentence, which is INCORRECT:
Although Berlin and Atlanta have a similar population size, people in Atlanta use cars while people in Berlin use mass transit and bikes.

The sentence that we wrote uses different words than the sentence that Paul Krugman wrote, but it is still Krugman’s thought. We can rewrite the sentence to make it acceptable by inserting Krugman’s name, as in Example 1, or by citing the author, as in Example 2.

Example 1. According to columnist Paul Krugman, although Berlin and Atlanta have a similar population size, people in Atlanta use cars while people in Berlin use mass transit and bikes.
Example 2. Although Berlin and Atlanta have a similar population size, people in Atlanta use cars while people in Berlin use mass transit and bikes (Krugman).

**Summarizing**
To summarize is to take a longer piece of writing and restate the overall points in a concise way. For example, you may be able to summarize a book in one or two paragraphs. You still need to cite the original author of the thoughts.

**Is there any instance where I don’t have to cite a source?**
Yes, there are two:
- If you are stating your own opinion or thought, you do not have to cite a source, as you are the author of the paper.
- If you are stating something that is common knowledge, you do not have to cite a source. For example, it is acceptable to state, “The United States declared its independence on July 4, 1776” because it is a widely known fact.

**References** (in APA format)