**The Art of Using Other People’s Words and Ideas – Without Getting in Trouble**

**Introduction:** One very important part of adapting to university culture – and learning how to write good papers for university courses - is mastering the art of using words and ideas from texts you read. When you write papers you definitely should use other people’s words and ideas. However, in academic culture, there are strict rules about how this should be done, and you need to learn these rules.

**Defining our terms:**

*Source* = the text (article, book, etc.) in which you find words and ideas you want to use in something you write; for example a book like *Shanghai Nightscapes: A Nocturnal Biography of a Global City* by James Farrer and Andrew Field. On page 32 you see the following sentence:

* *During the 1920s and 1930s, Shanghai was full of promising young writers steeped in the modernist trends of the age.*

*Citing* = using a citation (like the yellow part below) in your paper to say where you got an idea. For example, if you wanted to quote the sentence above, you should cite the source like this (the yellow part):

* *“During the 1920s and 1930s, Shanghai was full of promising young writers steeped in the modernist trends of the age” (Farrer and Field, 2015, p. 32).*

*Quoting* = using exactly the same words as your source, using quotation marks. (When you quote you need to give the page number in your citation.)

* *“During the 1920s and 1930s, Shanghai was full of promising young writers steeped in the modernist trends of the age” (Farrer and Field, 2015, p. 32).*

*Paraphrasing* = using your own words to state an idea you found in a source. (When you paraphrase, you do not need to cite the page.)

* *In the early 1900s, there were many young modernist writers in Shanghai* *(Farrer and Field, 2015).*

*Summarizing* = using your own words to state the main ideas from a source. While you can paraphrase a sentence or two, you summarize a paragraph, a chapter, or even a whole research article.

*Plagiarizing* = copying the exact words of a source without using quotation marks and telling us what the source is, or paraphrasing an idea without telling us the source. If you used the sentence below in your paper without citing the source, this would be plagiarism.

* *During the 1920s and 1930s, there were many young writers in Shanghai who were steeped in the modernist trends of the age.*

**Four basic rules for using words and ideas from sources:**

1. If you use the same words as your source, put the words in quotation marks and cite the source. Never use the exact same words as your source without quoting.
2. If you want to preserve the exact words from your source, quote. After you quote, you must cite the source (author’s name + year + page) like this: (Farrer and Field, 2015, p. 32).
3. If you want to use an idea from a source but you don’t need the exact words, paraphrase. After you paraphrase, you must cite the source (author’s name + year) like this: (Farrer and Field, 2015).
4. Don’t take phrases from a source, change a few words, and then use the phrases in your own paper without citing your source. This is dangerous because you may be guilty of plagiarism; it also makes your paper look unprofessional.

**Three basic strategies for making your paper look professional:**

1. Cite sources frequently using paraphrase or summary– this makes your paper look well-researched.
2. Quote infrequently – this is not common in engineering or the sciences.
3. List every work you cite in your paper in the Reference section at the end of the paper (see the example in yellow below). Having a good Reference section makes your paper look well-researched and believable. Here is an example:

Farrer, J., & Field, A. (2015). *Shanghai Nightscapes: A Nocturnal Biography of a Global City.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

**Final note:** It takes time to learn the art of using other people’s ideas and words – and the rules for avoiding plagiarism. However, the ideas above give you a good start.