
Avoiding Accidental Plagiarism

— Created by East Tennessee
Historical Society —


Method 1: Summary

The first way to avoid plagiarizing is to write an effective summary of your source. A good summary explains the main idea or main argument of the source in your own words without including details.

Method 1: Summary Example Part 1

Source: Travel in Tennessee has always been complicated by the region's many mountains and rivers as well as the Cumberland Plateau. The earliest white settlers in Tennessee followed paths through the mountains to settle in fertile river valleys in what is now the northeast corner of Tennessee. In the river valley settlement of Watauga, a remarkable event took place in the spring of 1775. Richard Henderson, a North Carolina land speculator negotiated the purchase of over 20 million acres of land in modern Kentucky and Middle Tennessee from the Cherokee. The purchase, completely illegal under British law, paved the way for the settlement of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland Plateau.

Summary: Settlers in early Tennessee faced many challenges including difficulty traveling and legally claiming land.



Notice how much shorter the summary is than the source text.

Adding the author's name

The next step is to add the author's name to the summary. By including the author's name, you are giving that person credit for his or her ideas. This ensures that you are not plagiarizing. There are several ways to include the author's name.

According to (author's name),

(Author's name) argues that

(Author's name) states that.....

Method 1: Summary Example Part 2

You can add the author's name at the beginning or end of the summary. One possibility is shown below.

Completed Summary:

According to Smith, settlers in early Tennessee faced many challenges including difficulty traveling and legally claiming land.

Method 2: Paraphrase

The second way to avoid plagiarizing is to paraphrase your source. Paraphrasing allows you to include more detail from the original source, but must still include the author's name and be in your own words.

Method 2: Paraphrase Example

Source: Travel in Tennessee has always been complicated by the region's many mountains and rivers as well as the Cumberland Plateau. The earliest white settlers in Tennessee followed paths through the mountains to settle in fertile river valleys in what is now the northeast corner of Tennessee. In the river valley settlement of Watauga, a remarkable event took place in the spring of 1775. Richard Henderson, a North Carolina land speculator negotiated the purchase of over 20 million acres of land in modern Kentucky and Middle Tennessee from the Cherokee. The purchase, completely illegal under British law, paved the way for the settlement of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland Plateau.

Notice the author's name is included



Paraphrase : Smith states that geographic features such as mountains and rivers made travel difficult for early Tennessee settlers. Richard Henderson illegally purchased a million acre of land from the Cherokee in early 1775. The purchase included Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland Plateau.


Method 3: Direct Quote

The third way to avoid plagiarizing is to directly quote your source. Quoting allows you to include the author's exact words. If you do not want to include an entire passage, you may use an ellipse to show where words were skipped. Be cautious not to overuse quotes. The finished product should reflect your thoughts and not just be a collection of quotations.

Method: Direct Quote Example

Source: Travel in Tennessee has always been complicated by the region's many mountains and rivers as well as the Cumberland Plateau. The earliest white settlers in Tennessee followed paths through the mountains to settle in fertile river valleys in what is now the northeast corner of Tennessee. In the river valley settlement of Watauga, a remarkable event took place in the spring of 1775. Richard Henderson, a North Carolina land speculator negotiated the purchase of over 20 million acres of land in modern Kentucky and Middle Tennessee from the Cherokee. The purchase, completely illegal under British law, paved the way for the settlement of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland Plateau.

Direct Quote: Smith states that Henderson's purchase of land in 1775 "paved the way for the settlement of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland Plateau."



Notice the author's name is included and the words in the quotation marks are exactly the same as the source.

In-line citation, Footnotes and Bibliography

Depending on type of paper or project you are creating, you may also need to use in-line citations or footnotes and include a bibliography. All National History Day projects must include an annotated bibliography. NHD research papers must have footnotes. If you are working on a NHD project, your teacher can sign you up for a free [Noodletools](#) account to help you keep track of your research and create your bibliography.

Practice Time!

Feel free to refer back to this presentation as you complete the practice worksheet.