

Citing Common Knowledge and Lived Experience

All information or data included in academic assignments should be cited. Not citing could result in a charge of plagiarism (see [UM Academic Integrity website](#)). The only time you are not expected to provide a source is when the information you write is your original analysis of the information/data you are presenting (i.e. no other researcher has reached similar conclusions), the results of an experiment you conducted, and in some cases “common knowledge” and personal or lived experience.

Common knowledge is knowledge shared by most people in a specific context. This context may be determined by location, age, culture, area of study, or any number of other factors. What is common in one context may not be common in another, and **most knowledge/information/data** included in an academic writing **is not common**. It is always better to cite, even if you think the information may be “common.”

Common knowledge examples

- Factual information that is difficult to attribute to one source
 - Canada has a federal constitutional monarchy.
 - The earth is tilted on its axis.
- Factual information that is attributable but largely accepted as true by the academic community. It is good practice to cite attributable information unless told otherwise.
 - The Big Bang is a theory that described the beginning of our universe.¹

Lived Experience is not typically included in an academic paper unless otherwise stated in the assignment guidelines (i.e. a reflection paper or work experience report); nevertheless, you may have been involved in historical, political or social events that are relevant to your research topic. You do not need to cite this experience, but it is expected that you will connect this experience to other research and/or analysis that must be cited.

Cautions:

- Some faculty may not require you to cite specific terms or concepts that are considered “common” to the discipline; for example, cognitive psychologists know that *memory rehearsal* is a strategy used to store information. However, other faculty will expect you to cite that information because citing demonstrates to the reader that you are well versed in basic disciplinary concepts.
- Current events, even if they are covered in the news (TV or print media), or talked about in class are not common knowledge and should be cited.
- **When in doubt, cite.** Citing does not diminish your analysis/argument; citing strengthens your argument or claim and shows your reader that you are aware of research available on the topic you are presenting.

References

Massachusetts Institution of Technology. (n.d.). *What is common knowledge*. Academic Integrity at MIT. <https://integrity.mit.edu/handbook/citing-your-sources/what-common-knowledge>
Princeton University. (2020). *Academic integrity at Princeton*.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20210316150707/https://odoc.princeton.edu/sites/odoc/files/Academic%20Integrity%20Booklet%202020-21.pdf>