Citation guidelines (Prof. Lohmann 1-4-2013)

In the prompts for the Weekly Reports, I refer to the readings posted on the class website in a shorthand fashion, e.g., Berreby (2005), pp. 123-125. In your Weekly Reports, you, too, can refer to the readings listed on the course website in a shorthand fashion; you don’t need to supply a list of works cited. If in a Weekly Report you refer to readings not listed on the course website, you would need to supply a list of works cited; if anything, err on the side of referring only to readings listed on the class website.

For your works cited list, you can use the citation style I employ for the readings on the course website (this is what I recommend), or you can use some other style as long as the style is standard, that is, as long as it is employed by some scholarly journal or in a book published by a university press.

Your reports may be run through TurnItIn to check for plagiarism. If you are found to have plagiarized, then depending on the severity of your case you may receive a failing grade for your report or for the course as a whole. The Office of the Dean of Students may apply additional penalties.

Many students, in an attempt to avoid plagiarizing, end up overquoting. Unfortunately, you can lose points or get a failing grade for overquoting (as well as misquoting, overciting, and misciting).

So that you can effectively negotiate this treacherous territory, I am supplying you with definitions of the various terms as well as examples. The definitions are not meant to be legally watertight, and the examples are not meant to be exhaustive. The idea is simply for you to develop a citation practice that does not trigger a loss in points or a failing grade.

(1) Plagiarizing
You plagiarize when you use someone else’s words without attributing those words to the person in question. Plagiarism will, at a minimum, lead to a grade penalty, and in severe cases you may get expelled from UCLA. By “severe cases” I mean, for example, you submit a paper you previously submitted to another class; you submit a paper written by another student under your own name; you purchase a paper on the Web and submit it under your own name.

Here’s an Obama quote that is floating around on the Web:

   Al Qaeda is still a threat. We cannot pretend somehow that because Barack Hussein Obama got elected as president, suddenly everything is going to be OK.

This particular version of the quote is from brainyquote.com (accessed 2-29-2012), but if you type these words into google, you’ll find that the quote shows up
on lots of websites with names like searchquotes.com, quotesnsayings.com, obamaquotes.com, and so forth. If you write these words as if they are your own words, that would be plagiarism.

(2) Misciting
If you write the above words and you cite, say, brainyquote.com, then you do not have a problem of plagiarism. Instead this is a miscite. The website brainyquote.com does not tell you from where it got this quote, nor does it date the quote. You need to track down a reasonable source, e.g., Politico:

> I think that it is important for Europe to understand that even though I'm now president and George Bush is no longer president, Al Qaeda is still a threat, and that we cannot pretend somehow that because Barack Hussein Obama got elected as president, suddenly everything is going to be OK,” he told the audience.

Here’s the Politico cite:


Incidentally, there are many different citation styles you might employ. You don’t have to cite sources in exactly the way I cite them, but you must employ a reasonable citation style. Reasonable means: the reader can date the cite; the reader can judge the credibility of the source; and the reader can track down source of the cite.

Incidentally, too, Politico is not the ideal source, although it is probably good enough for purposes of backing up this particular quote in a paper submitted to a course of mine. If you were preparing your paper for publication, you would need to track down the original source, as opposed to using a secondary source like Politico. The original source would be something like an announcement from the Office of the President to the effect that Obama said these words in a speech. Ideally, you would want to see the quote in its full context, such as the whole speech.

(3) Misquoting
It turns out that the quote, as it is floating around on the Web, is a misquote. Here’s how you might quote Politico correctly:

“[…] Al Qaeda is still a threat, and that we cannot pretend somehow that because Barack Hussein Obama got elected as president, suddenly everything is going to be OK,” Obama informed his listeners (politico.com 2009).
In other words, you need to add brackets with dots so as to indicate that you’ve left out part of Obama’s sentence. Moreover, you can’t tell from the Politico quote whether the sentence goes on after the word “OK.” To deal with this problem, you might write the following—

“[...] Al Qaeda is still a threat, and that we cannot pretend somehow that because Barack Hussein Obama got elected as president, suddenly everything is going to be OK” (politico.com 2009)

—but not the following:

“[...] Al Qaeda is still a threat, and that we cannot pretend somehow that because Barack Hussein Obama got elected as president, suddenly everything is going to be OK.”


In the latter case, the period at the end, within your quote, is a problem because it suggests that Obama’s sentence ends there, whereas for all you know the sentence might go on, and who knows what Obama said in the remainder of the sentence. Semi-relatedly, Obama might later on in his speech reverse himself, as in, “I just said Al Qaeda is still a threat, but let’s be real, people, there are more important things in the world we should be focused on right now.” I just made up this latter quote. My point is simply, if Obama reversed himself later on in his speech, then it would be misleading for you to let stand the words “Al Qaeda is still a threat” without telling the reader that Obama later reversed himself. Incidentally, this is also why it’s generally important to go to the original source and view the quote in context.

Let me return to the Politico cite. You might write:

“[...] Al Qaeda is still a threat, and that we cannot pretend somehow that because Barack Hussein Obama got elected as president, suddenly everything is going to be OK,” Obama informed his listeners (politico.com 2009).

It’s fine for you to reword the Politico quote and write “Obama informed his listeners.” You can’t say “Obama told the audience,” since those words are too similar to the original words of politico.com, “he told the audience”—that would be a case of plagiarism (an extremely minor case, admittedly, you’re not going to get expelled from UCLA for something that minor, but still). At the same time, quoting politico.com for “he told the audience” would be a case of overquoting, to which we turn next.

(4) Overquoting
A couple of years ago, a student submitted a paper that generated a 70% plagiarism score on TurnItIn. When I looked at the details, I found out that this
was not a case of plagiarism. Instead, the student had simply lifted lots of paragraphs from Wikipedia, surrounded those paragraphs with quotations marks, and properly attributed the paragraphs to Wikipedia. The following is not an exact quote from that paper, but it gives you an idea:

“Climate change is a significant and lasting change in the statistical distribution of weather patterns over periods ranging from decades to millions of years. It may be a change in average weather conditions or the distribution of events around that average (e.g., more or fewer extreme weather events). Climate change may be limited to a specific region or may occur across the whole Earth.” (Wikipedia, “Climate change,” accessed 2-29-2012)

This is a case of overquoting. The student quoted somebody else’s words and properly attributed those words to the other person, but the words are too “vanilla” to be quoted in the first place—the student should have summarized what that person said in their own words and then cited that person.

Actually, in this particular case (the Wikipedia climate change quote) the student should have used their own words and not cited Wikipedia. This is a case not only of overquoting but also of overciting, to which we turn next.

(5) Overciting
When you use Wikipedia (which is perfectly fine, just do it intelligently), you should not cite Wikipedia if what Wikipedia says has a “the sky is blue, the grass is green” quality about it. To fix ideas, the following is both an overquote and an overcite:

“The United States Congress is the bicameral legislature of the federal government of the United States, consisting of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Congress meets in the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Both senators and representatives are chosen through direct election. Each of the 435 members of the House of Representatives represents a district and serves a two-year term. House seats are apportioned among the states by population. Each state, regardless of population, has two senators; since there are fifty states, there are one hundred senators who serve six-year terms. The terms are staggered, so every two years, approximately one-third of the Senate is up for election. Most incumbents seek re-election, and their historical likelihood of winning subsequent elections exceeds 90%.” (Wikipedia, “United States Congress,” accessed 2-29-2012)

The only item in the above two paragraphs that might deserve a cite is the 90% statistic, and even then, if this statistic is totally uncontroversial and commonly
known, and if it’s not a critical piece of evidence in favor of your argument but simply part of a “vanilla” description of Congress, you might skip the cite. Then again, if you do need to provide a cite for the 90% statistic, then Wikipedia is not enough—you would need to track down the original cite for the 90% statistic.

While plagiarism is a matter of academic dishonesty, if you miscite, misquote, overquote, or overcite, you simply get graded down for incompetence. TurnItIn flags plagiarism and overquotes, but it can’t distinguish between the two (and by itself, it cannot identify miscites, misquotes, or overcites, though can serve as an aid for the identification of such offenses). It takes human judgment to interpret the TurnItIn plagiarism score. It is possible for a paper to get an extremely high plagiarism score from TurnItIn even though there’s no plagiarism or overquoting going on, for example, if the paper in question is about comparing and contrasting two Wikipedia articles in two different languages and the student author, as an integral part of providing evidence for their argument, quotes the two articles at great length.