When and why we document sources
TRUE OR FALSE?
“I need to cite sources only to avoid plagiarism; citations mean nothing to real readers.”

- Depending on the type of writing and the audience, this is usually false. While a lack of citations is a form of plagiarism, there are other reasons for including citations:
Documenting sources . . .

• Adds to your credibility:
  – Shows that you know what you are talking about and that your information is valid.
  – Shows that you have been paying attention to what others have said.

• Shows courtesy to those who have helped you form or support your ideas.

• Gives references for your readers to follow up.
When do we need to document?
“Plagiarism refers only to copying a source’s words without citation. You cannot plagiarize ideas.”

• Important thing to know:
  – Citations are needed for use of someone else’s words or ideas. You can plagiarize ideas.
“If I turn the source’s words completely into my own words, then they are my own and I don’t need to cite.”

• Important thing to know:
  – See previous slide!
“Since encyclopedias contain common knowledge, I can copy from them without citation.”

- Important thing to know:
  - Any *quotation* has to be cited: the *wording* is not common knowledge. Paraphrases of common knowledge don’t require citation.
“You can use a source, add a citation, and still be plagiarizing.”

• Important thing to know:
  – Quotations must be marked as such; without quotation marks, even with a citation, there’s plagiarism.
You have an idea. You later find the same idea in someone else’s work. Should you cite that other person?

• My response:
  – Why would you want not to?
  – It shows you know what that person said and that you are smart enough to notice it’s the same as what you’re saying.
Summary: give a citation for

• Absolutely any quotation
• Absolutely any statistic
• Any information or ideas that the source can take credit for, including
  – facts that derive from original research
  – new interpretations of facts
  – new points, questions, conclusions
Not necessary to cite “common knowledge”

• Facts
• Concepts, definitions
• Well-known theories

“Common” is understood in the context of the field. If all competent chemists (or historians, or anthropologists, etc.) know it, it’s common knowledge, even if you just learned it.
When in doubt, ask.

When still in doubt, document.