Citing Sources Correctly And Efficiently

Why Does Citation Matter?

For students unfamiliar with citation, begin with an explanation of why citing sources is necessary (not just that plagiarism is punishable: why does academic honesty matter?).

Well-Cited Sources Strengthen Your Argument

Explain that citation shows one's engagement with others' ideas and places oneself within an ongoing conversation. Knowing the publication information of cited works can help readers understand an author's place in the conversation more completely. For example, I can explain to my students that, if I know they are responding to something recent from a prominent national newspaper, I may understand their argument differently than if they are responding to an obscure, decades-old belief. Students can learn that citing sources well will strengthen and justify their arguments.

How To Increase Students' Citation Accuracy

Presenting this information as helpful to the student's efficacy rather than as an arbitrary rule or one that avoids "getting in trouble" makes students more aware of citation's communicative purpose. Five or ten minutes discussing the rules' rationale can benefit the accuracy of citation and students' belief in its import.

Specialized Citation Styles Necessitate Explanation

Of all the areas where specialized disciplinary knowledge matters, citation is probably the most central. Citation styles are so specialized that, if you feel strongly about students' citation format, you simply must spend time talking with them about it. Citation is hardly intuitive, and even very experienced scholarly writers still have to look up formats at times. With the explosion of new source types, knowing the resources for learning about citation is far more important than knowing how to cite sources by heart.

Encourage Students To Outsource To Citation Software

Encouraging students to use citation software is a very good idea. Citation formatting is tedious but doesn't require much thought; it has myriad rules but generally lacks logic. (There is some logic, but it's limited to things like where the date of publication goes.) Encouraging students to outsource this necessary but time-consuming work to online programs allows more time for them to locate, analyze, and integrate sources effectively.