

# AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

## RULE 1

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### When presenting a fact that is NOT common knowledge, always cite the source.

How does one determine what other people typically know as common knowledge? Common knowledge is knowledge relative to or common among a group or a community. A piece of information known to some may not be known to others because they do not share the right commonality. A simple way to consider what may or may not be common knowledge is to think of which groups people consider common among their family and/or friends, but not necessarily the community. Consider how much variety there is within religion, ethnicity, age, social group, media exposure, education, work, clubs, teams, classrooms, etc. All of these are held in common with some but not all. Now, consider the audience to which the information is being presented. Where is there commonality, and where is there none? Now, answer the question: what is common knowledge?

#### Activity

Assume you are writing a research paper on the classic book *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee for English. With the idea that the teacher is your audience, identify which statements below require citation and which do not by writing Y (for yes) or N (for no) on the blank. Be prepared to explain your decisions.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Harper Lee, author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, is an important 20<sup>th</sup> century American author.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Harper Lee was born in 1926 in Monroeville, Alabama.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee depicts the injustice of racial discrimination.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ The novel's narrator is a child named Scout, and the daughter of a lawyer named Atticus.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Southern society at the turn of the century was hierarchical, with income, family lineage, and personal accomplishments among the measures used to establish social rank.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Although *To Kill A Mockingbird* is a work of fiction and Lee denied that it was autobiographical, the character of Atticus shares many qualities with Lee's own father, who practiced law in a small Alabama town.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Neither black nor white women during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had the same freedom as modern American women.

#### Test yourself!

**Situation A:** *To Kill A Mockingbird* is a favorite book, and you have read much about topics related to the novel. You happen to know from your reading that Harper Lee based her character Dill on a friend, fellow author Truman Capote. You have no idea where you found out this information; you just remember having read it or heard it somewhere. Does it require a citation?

**Situation B:** You have taken a U.S. History class and remember being taught that Paul Revere was actually captured by the British outside of Concord before he was able to finish his ride to Lexington. Your friends, who were also in the class, remember learning this as well. You want to include it in your paper about the Midnight Ride. Does it require a citation?