

## **PART 1--Common Knowledge vs. Intellectual property**

### **C O M M O N   K N O W L E D G E**

Who owns ideas?

Some ideas nobody owns because we all do. Facts do not belong to anyone (just use your own words to express those facts). Nobody can own the fact that smoking can cause health problems, that filing one's own taxes can be a complicated process, or that weddings are stressful. And nobody owns the fact that Henry Ford made the Model T.

How do I tell what's common knowledge?

Here are a few tests:

- Does the information seem factual, like any source you consulted would say basically the same thing?
- Would someone else dispute the information?
- Does the information seem to be someone's opinion?

If the information DOES seem factual, does NOT seem like an opinion, and almost NOBODY would dispute it, the information is most likely common knowledge.

Examples of Common Knowledge:

**A--**Many college freshmen are unprepared for the level of freedom they experience their first semester.

*Why this is common knowledge:* This is a generally-accepted phenomenon that happens all over the country at almost every school.

In a paper, a student writer might use common knowledge information like this:

Because first-quarter freshmen are sometimes overwhelmed with new freedoms, it's best if they don't over-commit to teams, clubs, and projects.

*But even with common knowledge, if the student writer wants to use the **exact words of the source**, he or she will have to **quote the source directly**, as **only quotation marks cover borrowed words**.*

**B--**Owners value dogs' devotion and companionship.

*Why this is common knowledge:* It's no secret that people like dogs for these reasons. Almost anyone who has a dog shares this idea. Reword this and use it without a citation.

**C--**Poems are expressions of people's thoughts and desires.

*Why this is common knowledge:* This is a generic true statement that does not spark debate, even among literature professors. Where else would poems come from except from what people think about? Reword and use without a citation.

**D--**A sonnet is a 14-line poem with a structured meter and rhyme scheme.

*Why this is common knowledge:* It's a fact. This statement can be proven by looking up the term "sonnet" in the dictionary.

**E--**George Washington died in 1799.

*Why this is common knowledge:* Like the statement about the sonnet, this statement is factual. Any source that lists Washington's death date lists the same year. It's not in dispute. Everyone agrees this is the year he died.

**\*\*When you write a paper, you can use common knowledge without a citation if you use the information in your own words. But if you use the exact wording, you still have to quote what you borrow, as exact words always belong to the source. \*\***

## INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

When you think of what a person can own, most likely you think of cars, houses, boats, or jewelry. But people can also own things that are not tangible. They can own **intellectual property**.

The World Intellectual Property Organization defines intellectual property as "creations of the mind" ("What is Intellectual Property?"). Like most other kinds of property, intellectual property is protected, either by copyright or patent. Software, trademarks, logos, song lyrics, poems, and articles in magazines and journals are examples of intellectual property. These ideas and creative expressions belong to the people who create them.

**You must show that you borrowed intellectual property if you use it in a paper.** That's how intellectual property is different from common knowledge. In

Part Two of this tutorial we will learn how to add a citation ( ) after the information you borrow to show it belongs to someone else.

In a college setting, most students see other writers' intellectual property all the time, as they read textbooks and use articles from periodicals in research papers. Using other people's intellectual property in college classes is unavoidable, so students must learn the appropriate way to use it.

### How do I tell if information belongs to someone else?

Here are a few tests:

- Would most people be skeptical of the information and not automatically accept it as being true?
- Does the information sound like it's the opinion of some expert in some field?
- Does the information sound like it's from a study or research experiment?
- Does the information seem creative, like the writer is writing in a descriptive, subjective way?

If the information doesn't automatically strike you as true and it seems like it's more of an **educated opinion or creative description** rather than a fact, it's most likely someone's intellectual property. Indicate in your paper that you borrowed this information from a source.

### Examples of intellectual property

**A--**The very essence of drama is its ability to rip holes in our hearts in one scene and then mend them in the next.

*Why this belongs to someone:* It's a creative description of drama's impact on its viewers. You could say drama is moving and cathartic to watch and that's a generally accepted idea you would not cite, but if you use this exact description, cite it and put quotation marks around the exact words you use.

This sentence also expresses an opinion that this one aspect of drama--its ability to make viewers feel a wide range of emotions--is drama's essence, its very nature, its most important or most recognizable part. Clearly, that's an opinion. Cite the whole sentence:

John Mailer describes drama this way: "The very essence of drama is its ability to rip holes in our hearts in one scene and then mend them in the next" (77).

**B--**The study revealed that 76% of the 1,100 car owners surveyed did not change their own oil.

*Why this belongs to someone:* It's clearly part of a study that someone or some group did. They own the results. Cite the source.

According to the 2002 survey done by the Seattle Board of Waste Management, "76% of the 1,100 car owners surveyed did not change their own oil" (2).

**C--** The most significant change in the US in the last century is not in our technology but in our capacity to *create* technology.

*Why this belongs to someone:* This is a judgment that is not widely held. It is clearly an idea attached to one person, probably a sociologist or historian.

**D--** I swept away the curtains 'round her bed

revealing the waves of her golden-spiraled head

but the maiden--beautiful! tender!--lay dead.

*Why this belongs to someone:* This is a poem, a creative work. Someone wrote this using his or her imagination and arranged the words in that certain way to create a certain effect. If you borrow lines from the poem, cite what you borrow and give line numbers.

The narrator recounts the day he finds his lover murdered by a rival: "I swept away the curtains 'round her bed / revealing the waves of her golden-spiraled head / but the maiden--beautiful! tender!--lay dead" (12-14).

**E--** Clearly, Kennedy's poem takes its central image--a cowboy--and expands it to include ideas about loneliness and anger, both of which, it seems, apply to all men.

*Why this belongs to someone:* Not everyone who reads the poem will agree with this statement. There are many points of contention. Many might not see loneliness and anger as part of the cowboy's image, and others might not agree that loneliness and anger apply to all men. Some might not even agree that the central image is the cowboy. Again, it's an **educated opinion**.

Critic Krista Merriman notes that cowboys are also symbolic in the poem "All That's Left": "Kennedy's poem takes its central image--a cowboy--and expands it to include ideas about loneliness and anger, both of which, it seems, apply to all men" (122).

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READY FOR THE QUIZ OVER INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND COMMON KNOWLEDGE? IF SO, SELECT "**QUIZ 1**" ON THE LEFT MENU.

If you're not ready, review the material on this page again. You must answer all **5** questions correctly (100%) to successfully complete this part of the tutorial.

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#### Works Cited

"What is Intellectual Property?" [World Intellectual Property Organization](http://www.wipo.org)

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