NATHAN: Hey, Barbara?

BARBARA: Yes, Nathan?

NATHAN: I'm writing a research paper, and citing my sources is really slowing me down. Isn't there a quicker to format my sources properly?

BARBARA: I sympathize. Citing sources properly can be time consuming, and different citation styles use different formats.

NATHAN: You mean like APA, MLA, Chicago?

BARBARA: Yes. There are automated ways to cite your sources according to the various specifications of those styles. Microsoft Word is the most commonly used word processor that includes a citation tool. Depending on the version of Word you are using, the tool will be accessed in different ways. Try clicking on the View menu option, and from there, look for something like Document Elements or Citations. If you don't find it, try the References menu and look for Insert Citation. The tool will prompt you to enter the various elements of your citation, such as author, title, publication year, et cetera. It will then generate the full citation from the information you've entered.

NATHAN: OK. Awesome. That's great. So, now, what if I need a format that Word doesn't support?

BARBARA: Well, you may want to check with your instructor to make sure they're OK with you using a citation generator. There are a variety of free citation help tools available online that support a wide range of citation styles. For these tools, you'll usually need to type each element of publication information into a form. Sometimes you can enter, instead, an identifying number, such as an ISBN, digital object identifier, or PubMed number, which will allow the tool to extract citation information directly from the source.

NATHAN: Cool. It sounds like those tools do all my citation work for me.

BARBARA: Well, they can't do everything for you. Remember when you're entering the publication information into the tool yourself, the accuracy and formatting of the citations will only be as good as you make it. For example, if you misspell the author's name, that same typo will appear in the citation. Also, if you use an online tool that requires you to copy and paste the formatted citation into your document, make sure that the font of the citation matches the font of the document and that any special features of the citation, such as italics and hanging indents, transfer into the document, as well.

You should always keep in mind the usual warnings about relying on automated processes that can't think for themselves. Make sure you proofread an automatically generated bibliography at least as carefully as you would proofread one you prepared on your own, and double-check that the format matches the style your instructor wants you to use. If you have anything you have a question about, check a handbook or research guide to make sure your citation is correct.

NATHAN: Those are great tips. Thank you, Barbara.

BARBARA: Anytime.