Incorporating Other’s Ideas in Your Work

To avoid plagiarism, do you have to avoid using anybody else's work and just use your own thoughts in writing? No. Academic research papers and projects are all about building up other people's writing and research. Including other people's ideas in your own research project is fine. In fact, it's usually a necessary component of your writing. However, you need to let your readers know when you are building on someone else's ideas. There are several ways you can refer to another writer's work including paraphrasing, or putting someone else's ideas into your own words, direct quotations, and summarizing ideas. Let's say you're working on a historical analysis of the existence of leprechauns. You do some thinking and write a paragraph about what you already know about leprechauns based on your own thoughts and words. Then you do some research and find more information about leprechauns written by various leprechaun experts. You paraphrase the main ideas from several recent studies, or put the information into your own words. Then you find a statement from a leading expert that gets to the heart of the issue. You decide to use a statement as a direct quotation in your paper. Then you summarize a paper that lays out the key points among scientists who were initially skeptical that leprechauns did in fact exist. As you can see, this paper would be a blend of your own ideas and the research and opinions of experts in the field. Sometimes you'll use a signal phrase, or short introduction, to let your reader know that you're including other people's research. Whenever you use others ideas and words you need a brief in-text citation to give the reader at-a-glance information about whose work is being referenced. Then you need to include a full citation at the end of the paper in a references or works cited list. How you cite your sources depends on the style you're using.