

# Plagiarism

## What is Plagiarism?

**Presenting someone else's words or ideas as your own**, whether intentional or not, constitutes plagiarism. Any time the original thought, words, or pictures did not come from your own head, you must give credit to the original source by showing exactly where you found the material. This is called citing, or documenting, your sources.

Here is a comment about plagiarism from the University of British Columbia:

Students anxious about committing plagiarism often ask: "How much do I have to change a sentence to be sure I'm not plagiarizing?" A simple answer to this is: If you have to ask, you're probably plagiarizing. This is important. Avoiding plagiarism is not an exercise in inventive paraphrasing. There is no magic number of words that you can add or change to make a passage your own. Original work demands original thought and organization of thoughts.<sup>1</sup>

Plagiarism is unethical; it violates the rights of the original author. But the person whose work is stolen is not the only one who loses. People who plagiarize also lose, because they miss out on the learning that occurs in the process of conducting research, reading, writing and revising. There are tangible consequences as well; Northern Kentucky University has strict rules against plagiarism. Breaking these rules can result in a failing grade for the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the school.

## Quoting and Paraphrasing

**Both DIRECT QUOTES and PARAPHRASES must be documented.**

Paraphrasing is rewriting a passage in your own words. It is important to remember that even if you rewrite a passage, you must still cite the original source of the idea.

Let's say you want to use the following passage, which appears on page 27 of Earl R. Krushke's book, *Gun Control: A Reference Handbook*.

Gun control has also been forced upon Native Americans. The taking of Indians' guns was often accompanied by other oppressive measures and, indeed, some have argued that there was at one time in American history a possibly overt attempt to exterminate them as a people.

If you paraphrase this passage as follows, you are guilty of plagiarism:

Early American actions against Native Americans, including a ban on gun ownership, cause some to speculate that there were attempts to eradicate the group entirely.

Why? Because even though you have substituted some of the words with your own, the original idea belongs to someone else, and you haven't documented your source.

The following passage is an acceptable way to present the material:

# Plagiarism

Early American actions against Native Americans, including a ban on gun ownership, cause some to speculate that there were attempts to eradicate the group entirely (Krushke 27).

Good examples of paraphrases can be found at [Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It](#) and at [Citing Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism](#).

For help with correct citation formats and other rules of documentation, see [Citations](#).

## Documenting Sources

### Types of Sources that Must be Documented

There is a common misconception that only printed sources of information, like books and magazine articles, need to be formally cited. In fact, audiovisual and electronic sources -- even email messages -- must be documented as well, if you use ideas or words from them in your paper. Here are some examples of the kinds of sources that should be cited:

- books or parts of books
- encyclopedia articles
- magazine and journal articles
- electronic full-text articles
- software
- web pages
- email messages
- listserv or newsgroup postings
- films or videos
- recordings
- TV or radio broadcasts
- interviews
- speeches
- letters

Reproducing someone else's work on your web page:

If you reproduce someone else's material on your web page, you are in effect distributing that material and you should therefore understand copyright law and fair use guidelines. As a general rule, to avoid copyright infringement you must obtain permission before posting the material.

### Types of Information that **Must be Documented**

All of the following need to be documented in the body of your paper:

- Direct quotes (exact words) from other sources
- Paraphrases and summaries of material found in other sources
- Pictures, photos, poems, cartoons, or other art work you did not create yourself
- Figures, tables, or statistics found in other sources

# Plagiarism

- Quotes or sayings that are not familiar, or facts that are not "common knowledge."

Exceptions:

- It is not necessary to cite a source if you are repeating a well known quote such as Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you . . .," or a familiar proverb such as "You can't judge a book by its cover."
- Common knowledge is something that is widely known. For example, it is common knowledge that George Bush was president from 1989-1992. It would not be necessary to cite a source for this fact. On the other hand, the number of murders involving guns each year is not common knowledge -- most of us would have to look it up. The source of this information would have to be cited.

## Note-Taking Tips

If you're not careful while taking notes, it may be hard to tell later on whether certain passages were copied exactly, paraphrased, or simply your own ideas that you jotted down as you were reading. Sloppy note-taking increases the risk that you will unintentionally plagiarize. Here are some tips for taking notes:

- Identify words that you copy directly from a source by placing quotation marks around them, copying them in a different-colored ink, or highlighting them. You might even use separate index cards of a different color just for quoted passages. Make sure to indicate the exact beginning and end of the quoted passage. Copy the wording, punctuation and spelling exactly as it appears in the original.
- Jot down the page number and author or title of the source each time you make a note, even if you are not quoting directly but are only paraphrasing.
- Keep a working bibliography of your sources so that you can go back to them easily when it's time to double-check the accuracy of your notes. (If you do this faithfully during the note-taking phase, you will have no trouble completing the "works cited" section of your paper later on.)

What to include in your working bibliography:

**BOOKS:**

author or editor, title, place of publication, publisher, and date.

**CHAPTERS or PARTS OF BOOKS:**

author of chapter, title of chapter, and the preceding information for the book itself.

**ARTICLES:**

author of the article, title of the article, title of the magazine/journal/newspaper, volume and issue number, date, and pages.

**INTERNET SOURCES:**

author (if known), title of the page or document, title of the complete work (if applicable), date of publication or last revision, URL, and date of access.

# Plagiarism

## Writing Tips

As you write your paper, remember that your purpose is not to summarize what other people have said. You are contributing your own ideas to the body of information about your topic. Your sources should serve only to illustrate or support your statements, not to provide the content of your paper.

Read your draft carefully. If the choice of words in a given passage is not your own, then you should either paraphrase or quote the source directly (properly citing the source in either instance). A good way to paraphrase a source is to read the passage, cover what you just read, and rewrite it in your own words without referring to the original. This will help you avoid the common mistake of changing words one at a time in an effort to make the language your own.

For a great tutorial, visit Sarah Hamid's [Writing a Research Paper](#) at the [Purdue University Online Writing Lab](#).

## Resources for Instructors

Articles and general information:

### [Electronic Plagiarism Seminar](#)

A seminar for faculty held at LeMoyne College, with links to term paper sites and detection software, by Gretchen Pearson

### [Anti-Plagiarism Strategies for Research Papers](#)

Robert Harris, Vanguard University of Southern California

### [Student Plagiarism in an Online World](#)

Prism Magazine Online, by Julie J.C.H. Ryan.

## NOTES:

1. Gordon, Colin H., Peter Simmons, Graeme Wynn, and the University of British Columbia Faculty of Arts. "Example #4." *Plagiarism: What it is and How to Avoid it*. Biology Program Guide 1999/2000. 2/1/00.