History

Avoiding Plagiarism

What Is Plagiarism?

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, to plagiarize is to "steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as... one's own." Plagiarism is "literary theft" and can be intentional or unintentional. Intentional plagiarism includes actions such as buying a paper from a Web site, copying an entire paper from another source, turning in someone's paper as your own, and hiring someone to write a paper for you. Unintentional plagiarism is less clear. The following actions are forms of plagiarism, whether intentional or not:

Not placing a direct quotation in quotation marks

You have plagiarized if you use someone else's exact words or phrases and do not use quotation marks, even if you include a parenthetical reference or a footnote after it. For example:

Original Source
The most common form of execution in the United States is lethal injection, a series of intravenous injections of three drugs that causes a fatal overdose. More than 85% of the executions since 1976 have been by lethal injection.

Plagiarized Example
In the United States, capital punishment is administered mostly by means of lethal injection, using a series of intravenous injections of three drugs that causes a fatal overdose. More than 85% of the executions since 1976 have been by lethal injection.

For more information on using quotations correctly, see Using Quotations.

Following another's sentence too closely

If you only change a word or two in the sentence, delete some words, or change the order within or among sentences, you are plagiarizing, not paraphrasing. For example:

Original Source
For years, debate has raged in the United States over how to handle the estimated 11 million people living in the country illegally. While many opponents of illegal immigration argue that these immigrants should be deported—or face such unfriendly conditions that they choose to leave willingly, or "self-deport"—others argue that undocumented immigrants in many ways help fuel the U.S. economy, toiling for low wages in jobs—such as physically arduous farm work—that most Americans refuse to do.

Plagiarized Example
There have been arguments for a long time over what should be done about the estimated 11 million immigrants living illegally in the United States. Some people hold that undocumented immigrants help the U.S. economy in many ways by doing low-wage jobs, such as farm work, that most Americans refuse to do. Others contend that those immigrants should be deported—or face such unfriendly conditions that they leave of their own accord.

Placing parenthetical references or footnotes in the wrong place so that paraphrased material looks like your own idea

For example:

Original Source
In October 2001, less than a month after the [September 11, 2001] attacks, Congress passed the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act, better known as the USA Patriot
Act. The law enhanced the government's powers to help it better avert another terrorist attack. Section 215 of the Patriot Act allows investigators to ask the FISA Court to allow intelligence agents to examine "any tangible things (including books, records, papers, documents, and other items)" as part of antiterrorism or foreign intelligence investigations. Section 215 has since served as the legal basis for broad government surveillance programs.

Plagiarized Example
Congress first passed the USA Patriot Act less than a month after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Section 215 provides for the FISA Court to authorize foreign intelligence or antiterrorism investigators to examine any tangible items, and has served as the government's legal basis for its broad surveillance programs.

In the example above, the second sentence is presented as the writer's own idea, not as a paraphrase.

For more information on paraphrasing, see *Paraphrase Correctly*.

Using another source's original idea without including a parenthetical reference or a footnote

For example:

Original Source
"Chronic population loss," as it is known, leads to abandoned houses and neighborhoods that act as magnets for crime, reducing the quality of life for the remaining residents. Vacant houses also fall into disrepair, blighting cities and subsequently driving down the value of surrounding properties. Furthermore, the absence of tenants and homeowners impacts local city budgets; with fewer residents, there are fewer people to pay taxes, meaning cities must often scale back on key services, such as trash collection and police patrols.

Plagiarized Example
As neighborhoods lose population—which reduces the municipal authority's tax base and ability to deliver vital services like police patrols and sanitation—and their vacated homes are abandoned, the surrounding properties lose value.

Using too much of someone else's work

If most of your paper is made up of other people's ideas and words, even if you cite correctly, it may be considered plagiarism. Because plagiarism is a form of theft, it is a very serious offense in both the academic and professional worlds. Most schools punish plagiarists. The student may receive a failing grade for the paper or the class. Some schools will suspend or expel the student.

Most cases of plagiarism arise because of poor citing and referencing. Luckily, you can avoid plagiarizing if you know how to cite and reference your sources properly. As a general rule, remember that any time you use someone else's words or ideas, you should include a citation.

How Can I Avoid Plagiarism?

As well as knowing how to cite and reference your sources, use the following tips to help you avoid plagiarism.

Taking Notes

1. Before you start taking notes from a certain source, record at the top of the page the author's name, the article title, the publication date, and, if you are using an electronic source, the URL and date of access. Remember to note this information for each source that you use. When you begin writing your paper, this information will help you see which author made certain arguments. It will also help you to cite and reference your sources.

1. If you see a certain phrase or sentence that you would like to quote in your paper, place the phrase in quotation marks in your notes. When you begin writing your paper, this will serve as a reminder that the phrase is a quotation, not your own words. Remember that not placing a direct quotation in quotation marks is considered plagiarism.
Give yourself credit. While you are reading and taking notes, you might think of a point you would like to argue in your paper. Write your idea down, but highlight it or draw a circle around it so that you know this is your idea and not something you read in another source.

Using Quotations

Before you quote, begin the sentence with the author's name or the title of the article. This indicates to your reader that you are about to use someone else's words and ideas. Examples: Prejean argues that "capital trials cost four to six times more than ordinary trials" (225); According to the author of "Immigration," some groups "argue that immigrants erode the shared value system that defines America." If necessary, make sure you include a parenthetical reference or footnote at the end of the sentence.

Place all quotations in quotation marks. If the quotation is long, you may need to indent it. Check with your teacher or style guide to see what rules you should follow for long quotations.

Use quotations sparingly. Only quote when you think using the author's exact words is the best way to make a point. Do not include long quotations just because you need to submit a certain number of pages or words.

If you need to include a quotation within a quotation (sometimes called an embedded quotation) use single quotation marks ('...') instead of double ("...") to differentiate the embedded quotation from the surrounding one.

If you need to shorten a quotation, use an ellipsis (...) to indicate that you have left words out. If you need to add a word to a quotation to make it clearer, add the word or words in square brackets [ ]. Be very careful not to change the original meaning of a quotation in the process of shortening it, or in adding necessary background. See examples below.

Original Source
The Coshocton program—privately funded, like Texas's AP incentive program—involves third to sixth graders. Only half of the students received money; the other half did not, and served as a control group. At the end of the four-year program, researchers discovered that math grades were far higher among the students who received payments. However, in social studies, reading and science, there was no difference in grades between the two groups. Additionally, the year after the program ended, reading scores among the children who had received monetary rewards plummeted.

Shortening a Quotation Correctly
"Only half of the [Coshocton] students received money; the other half... served as a control group. At the end of the four-year program... math grades were far higher among the students who received payments. However, in social studies, reading and science, there was no difference in grades between the two groups."

Shortening a Quote Incorrectly
"Only half of the [Coshocton] students received money; the other half... served as a control group. At the end of the four-year program... there was no difference in grades between the two groups."

Adding a Word or Words Correctly
"The 18th century went even further [than Locke's concept of the tabula rasa], to a common vision of a child as innately good, as long as he or she was not corrupted by the influence of bad training."

Adding a Word or Words Incorrectly
"The 18th century went even further [than the belief in original sin], to a common vision of a child as innately good, as long as he or she was not corrupted by the influence of bad training."

Paraphrase Correctly

Paraphrasing means taking facts or ideas from another source and putting them into your own words. Following another's wording or sentence structure too closely is not paraphrasing. Remember that the words and sentences should be your own and in your style, rather than those of the author. If you are worried about following another's words too closely, try reading
the source and taking notes only after you have closed the book or minimized the onscreen page. When you have finished
writing, check your paraphrase against the original source. If you have used two or more consecutive words of the author's,
place the words in quotation marks.

Before you paraphrase, begin the sentence with the author's name or the title of the article. This indicates to your reader
that you are about to use someone else's ideas. Examples: Prejean argues that capital trials are more expensive (225);
According to the author of "Immigration," some groups believe immigration has a negative effect on the United States. If
necessary, make sure you include a parenthetical reference or footnote at the end of the sentence.

Check Your Citations

1. Be consistent when citing. Include source information each time you quote, paraphrase, or use someone else's words or
   ideas.
2. When you have finished writing your paper, go through it and check all parenthetical references or footnotes. Make sure
   that each parenthetical reference has a corresponding entry in your Works Cited or References list (see Citing Sources).
   Make sure that each footnote has a corresponding entry at the end of the page. If you are using endnotes, make sure that
each note has a corresponding entry in your Notes or Footnotes page. Remember that including false citation information is
also considered plagiarism.

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