

How to Avoid Plagiarism

Know what plagiarism is:

Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition

Main Entry: *plagiarize*

Pronunciation: 'plA-j&-'rIz *also* -jE-&-

Function: *verb*

Inflected Form(s): -rized; -rizing

Etymology: *plagiary*

transitive senses : to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own : use (another's production) without crediting the source

intransitive senses : to commit literary theft : present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source

- *plagiarizer* *noun*

Encyclopedia Britannica Definition

Plagiarism is the act of claiming to be the author of material that someone else actually wrote.

Plagiarism is defined as "the act of passing off as one's own, the ideas or writings of another."

1. If the way in which you are using the source is unclear, make it clear.
2. If you received specific help from someone in writing the paper, acknowledge it.
3. If you use someone else's ideas, and/or words you should cite the source.

If you use someone else's ideas, and/or words you must cite the source!

Give Credit Where Credit's Due

Plagiarism -- the attempt to pass off the ideas, research, theories, or words of others as one's own -- is a serious academic offense. Most students know when they are intentionally plagiarizing, for example copying an entire essay out of a book or buying a paper off the Internet. However, many people are tripped up by unintentional plagiarism -- not giving proper credit for others' quotes, facts, ideas, or data.

When in Doubt, Give Credit

A good rule-of-thumb is to always give credit for any ideas that aren't yours by citing your sources. Different disciplines, publications, and professors have different standards for citation. Usually, your professor or teaching assistant will specify how you should present your citations, and if they don't, ask.

Here are some common citation formats:

Footnotes and Endnotes

For longer papers especially, a widely used form of citation is the footnote or endnote. After a quote or paraphrase, a small, superscript number appears. This number corresponds with a numbered note either at the bottom of the page or the end of the text. Your citation and foot- or endnote should look something like this:

Commenting on the history of climate change, Kennedy notes, "We have known since the early 1900s that global temperatures between 90,000 and 10,000 years ago underwent sudden dramatic shifts."¹²

12 Don Kennedy, "New Climate News," *Science*, volume 290 (November 10, 2000), 1091.

In-Text Citations

These will usually suffice if you are referring to a small number of assigned texts or you are including a bibliography with the more specific information about the texts you cite. In-text citations usually list either the name of the publication or the author of the work. Here is an example:

Bellow writes, "Knowledge divorced from life equals sickness" (*More Die of Heartbreak*, p. 7).

Here is another acceptable way to format in-text citations:

The term "hunter-gatherer," when used to describe nomadic societies that practice neither agriculture nor animal husbandry, places undue emphasis on hunting both as a source of nutrition (Oakes, 1980, 121) and as a time commitment (Peachtree, 12).

If you use this approach, make sure you include enough information about each of the sources you are citing so that it can be identified in your bibliography. The reason that Oakes has a date and Peachtree doesn't is that this writer's bibliography included two articles by Oakes and only one by Peachtree. Also, once you've chosen a way to format your citations, be consistent.

Citing Material from Websites

Rules for citing websites are still evolving. For now, a good general rule is to give the site's name, the page's URL, the date of publication if you are citing an article or a journal, and the date you consulted it, as shown below:

Mihm, Stephen. "Pet Theory: Do Cats Cause Schizophrenia?" *Lingua Franca*, December 2000/January 2001. Online. Available: http://www.linguafranca.com/print/0012/cover_pet.html. November 30, 2000.

A word of caution about using the Internet for research: the Web is full of rumors posing as facts, as well as plagiarism of every sort, so evaluate sources carefully before relying on them.

When DON'T You Have to Cite?

Common Knowledge

You don't have to give credit for a fact stated in your own words. For instance, information that is common knowledge does not need to be cited:

Thelonious Monk, acclaimed jazz pianist and composer, wrote the classic tune, "Round Midnight."

Your Own Ideas

You also don't have to give a citation for facts or ideas that you, yourself, have established. However, it's always a good idea to make the origin of such material clear, as shown in the example below:

After conducting a survey of sophomore engineering majors, I found that 72 percent cite the potential for high salaries after graduation as an important factor in their choice of major.

Is Paraphrasing Plagiarism?

Paraphrasing is putting information and ideas into other words for the sake of clarity or brevity. Used properly, paraphrasing can be a powerful tool for both explaining ideas and making persuasive arguments. But what constitutes proper and improper use of the paraphrase?

Take the following example of an original text:

The lost-wax casting process (also called *cire perdue*, the French term) has been used for many centuries. It probably started in Egypt. By 200 BCE the technique was known in China and ancient Mesopotamia and was soon after used by the Benin peoples in Africa. It spread to ancient Greece sometime in the sixth century BCE and was widespread in Europe until the eighteenth century, when a piece-mold process came to predominate.

--Marilyn Stokstad, *Art History, Volume Two* (New York, Prentice Hall, Inc. and Harry Abrams, Inc., 1995), 31.

And here is a paraphrase:

The lost-wax casting process is an ancient method for making metal sculpture. While the ancient Egyptians appear to have been its first practitioners, other cultures around the world also developed or imported the technique. Introduced to Europe by the ancient Greeks in the sixth century BCE, lost-wax casting remained an important artistic method up to the eighteenth century (Stokstad, 31).

Rather than simply restating the text, the author of the paraphrase changes the text to draw out a particular idea and leaves out the details that aren't relevant to the point she's making. Moreover, she adds some clarity by including a short definition of the lost-wax method in her opening sentence. Most importantly, the author has cited her source by author and page number.

A Note on Notes

If you are not careful in your note-taking process, it's very easy to closely paraphrase or even copy a source unintentionally. When in doubt, copy out the exact words of the original quote in your notes, put it in quotation marks, and include the citation information. Then you can later decide whether to quote or paraphrase, according to your reason for citing the text.

Avoid Plagiarism in Oral Presentations

It is very easy to use other people's words in a speech without realizing it. Do your best to make it clear when you are borrowing. For example, you can say, "As the Roman playwright Terence observed, 'While there's life, there's hope.'" Keep a written list of citations you can use as a reference if you are asked about your quotes.

Plagiarism can be a risk if you depend too heavily on outside sources. But if you rely on your own ideas, are conscientious about citing your sources, and are careful about how you paraphrase, you can steer clear of it, and write better papers or speeches in the process.