What is Plagiarism?

Many people think of plagiarism as copying another's work, or borrowing someone else's original ideas. But terms like "copying" and "borrowing" can disguise the seriousness of the offense:

According to the *Merriam-Webster OnLine Dictionary*, to "plagiarize" means
1) to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
2) to use (another's production) without crediting the source
3) to commit literary theft
4) to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

In other words, plagiarism is an act of *fraud*. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward.

But can words and ideas really be stolen?

According to U.S. law, the answer is yes. In the United States and many other countries, the expression of original ideas is considered <u>intellectual property</u>, and is protected by <u>copyright laws</u>, just like original inventions. Almost all forms of expression fall under copyright protection as long as they are recorded in some media (such as a book or a computer file).

All of the following are considered plagiarism:
- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not (see our section on "fair use" rules)
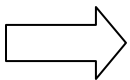
Attention! Changing the words of an original source is *not* sufficient to prevent plagiarism. If you have retained the essential idea of an original source, and have not cited it, then no matter how drastically you may have altered its context or presentation, *you have still plagiarized*

Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by <u>citing</u> sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism.

Preventing Plagiarism: Student Resources

In a research paper, you have to come up with your own original ideas while at the same time using work that's already been done by others. But how can you tell where their ideas end and your own begin? What's the proper way to include sources in your paper? If you change some of what an author said, do you still have to cite that person?

Confusion about the answers to these questions often leads to plagiarism. If you have similar questions, or are concerned about preventing plagiarism, we recommend using the checklist below.

A. Consult with your instructor
Have questions about plagiarism? If you can't find the answers on our site, or are unsure about something, you should ask your instructor. He or she will most likely be very happy to answer your questions. You can also check out the guidelines for <u>citing sources properly</u>. If you follow them, and the rest of the advice on this page, you should have no problems with plagiarism.

B. Plan your paper
Planning your paper well is the first and most important step you can take toward preventing plagiarism. If you know you are going to use other sources of information, you need to plan how you are going to include them in your paper. This means working out a balance between the ideas you have taken from other sources and your own, original ideas. Writing an outline, or coming up with a thesis statement in which you clearly formulate an argument *about* the information you find, will help establish the boundaries between your ideas and those of your sources.

C. Take Effective Notes
One of the best ways to prepare for a research paper is by taking thorough notes from all of your sources, so that you have much of the information organized before you begin writing. On the other hand, poor note-taking can lead to many problems – including improper citations and misquotations, both of which are forms of plagiarism! To avoid confusion about your sources, try using different colored fonts, pens, or pencils for each one, and make sure you clearly distinguish your own ideas from those you found elsewhere. Also, get in the habit of marking page numbers, and make sure that you record bibliographic information or web addresses for every source right away – finding them again later when you are trying to finish your paper can be a nightmare!

D. When in doubt, cite sources
   Of course you want to get credit for your own ideas. And you don't want your instructor to think that you got all of your information from somewhere else. But if it is unclear whether an idea in your paper really came from you, or whether you got it from somewhere else and just changed it a little, you should always cite your source. Instead of weakening your paper and making it seem like you have fewer original ideas, this will actually strengthen your paper by: 1) showing that you are not just copying other ideas but are processing and adding to them, 2) lending outside support to the ideas that are completely yours, and 3) highlighting the originality of your ideas by making clear distinctions between them and ideas you have gotten elsewhere.

E. Make it clear who said what
   Even if you cite sources, ambiguity in your phrasing can often disguise the real source of any given idea, causing inadvertent plagiarism. Make sure when you mix your own ideas with those of your sources that you always clearly distinguish them. If you are discussing the ideas of more than one person, watch out for confusing pronouns. For example, imagine you are talking about Harold Bloom's discussion of James Joyce's opinion of Shakespeare, and you write: "He brilliantly portrayed the situation of a writer in society at that time." Who is the "He" in this sentence? Bloom, Joyce, or Shakespeare? Who is the "writer": Joyce, Shakespeare, or one of their characters? Always make sure to distinguish who said what, and give credit to the right person.

F. Know how to Paraphrase:
   A paraphrase is a restatement in your own words of someone else's ideas. Changing a few words of the original sentences does NOT make your writing a legitimate paraphrase. You must change both the words and the sentence structure of the original, without changing the content. Also, you should keep in mind that paraphrased passages still require citation because the ideas came from another source, even though you are putting them in your own words.

   The purpose of paraphrasing is not to make it seem like you are drawing less directly from other sources or to reduce the number of quotations in your paper. It is a common misconception among students that you need to hide the fact that you rely on other sources. Actually it is advantageous to highlight the fact that other sources support your own ideas. Using quality sources to support your ideas makes them seem stronger and more valid. Good

paraphrasing makes the ideas of the original source fit smoothly into your paper, emphasizing the most relevant points and leaving out unrelated information.

G. Evaluate Your Sources
Not all sources on the web are worth citing – in fact, many of them are just plain wrong. So how do you tell the good ones apart? For starters, make sure you know the author(s) of the page, where they got their information, and when they wrote it (getting this information is also an important step in avoiding plagiarism!). Then you should determine how credible you feel the source is: how well they support their ideas, the quality of the writing, the accuracy of the information provided, etc.

What is Citation?

A "citation" is the way you tell your readers that certain material in your work came from another source. It also gives your readers the information necessary to find that source again, including:
- information about the author
- the title of the work
- the name and location of the company that published your copy of the source
- the date your copy was published
- the page numbers of the material you are borrowing

Why should I cite sources?

Giving credit to the original author by citing sources is the only way to use other people's work without plagiarizing. But there are a number of other reasons to cite sources:
- Citations are extremely helpful to anyone who wants to find out more about your ideas and where they came from.
- Not all sources are good or right – your own ideas may often be more accurate or interesting than those of your sources. Proper citation will keep you from taking the rap for someone else's bad ideas.
- Citing sources shows the amount of research you've done.
- Citing sources strengthens your work by lending outside support to your ideas.

Doesn't citing sources make my work seem less original?

Not at all. On the contrary, citing sources actually helps your reader distinguish your ideas from those of your sources. This will actually emphasize the originality of your own work.

When do I need to cite?

Whenever you borrow words or ideas, you need to acknowledge their source. The following situations almost always require citation:
- Whenever you use quotes
- Whenever you paraphrase
- Whenever you use an idea that someone else has already expressed
- Whenever you make specific reference to the work of another
- Whenever someone else's work has been critical in developing your own ideas.

Important Terms

Attribution

The acknowledgement that something came from another source.

The following sentence properly *attributes* an idea to its original author: Jack Bauer, in his article "Twenty-Four Reasons not to Plagiarize," maintains that cases of plagiarists being expelled by academic institutions have risen dramatically in recent years due to an increasing awareness on the part of educators.

Bibliography

A list of sources used in preparing a work.

Citation

1) A short, formal indication of the source of information or quoted material.
2) The act of quoting material or the material quoted.

Cite

1) to indicate a source of information or quoted material in a short, formal note.
2) to quote
3) to ascribe something to a source

Common	Information that is readily available from a number
Knowledge	of sources, or so well-known that its sources do not have to be cited.
	The fact that carrots are a source of Vitamin A is common knowledge, and you could include this information in your work without attributing it to a source. However, any information regarding the effects of Vitamin A on the human body are likely to be the products of original research and would have to be cited.
Copyright	A law protecting the intellectual property of individuals, giving them exclusive rights over the distribution and reproduction of that material.
Facts	Knowledge or information based on real, observable occurrences.
	Just because something is a fact does not mean it is not the result of original thought, analysis, or research. Facts can be considered intellectual property as well. If you discover a fact that is not widely known nor readily found in several other places, you should cite the source.
Fair Use	The guidelines for deciding whether the use of a source is permissible or constitutes a copyright infringement.
Intellectual Property	A product of the intellect, such as an expressed idea or concept, that has commercial value
Original	1) Not derived from anything else, new and unique 2) Markedly departing from previous practice 3) The first, preceding all others in time 4) The source from which copies are made
Paraphrase	A restatement of a text or passage in other words
	It is extremely important to note that changing a few words from an original source does NOT qualify as paraphrasing. A paraphrase must make significant changes in the style and voice of the original *while retaining the essential ideas*. If you change the ideas, then you are not paraphrasing – you are misrepresenting the ideas of the original, which could lead to serious trouble.

Plagiarism The reproduction or appropriation of someone else's work without proper attribution; passing off as one's own the work of someone else

Quotation Using words from another source

Self-plagiarism Copying material you have previously produced and passing it off as a new production. This can potentially violate copyright protection, if the work has been published, and is banned by most academic policies.