

# Plagiarism

When a person uses someone else's words or ideas without citing the source and presents them as his or her own, either knowingly or "accidentally," that person has stolen someone's intellectual property.

Plagiarism is a serious academic and legal offense. Journalists have lost jobs for plagiarizing. Writers have been sued. And students have been kicked out of school. No one wants you to get into any trouble, so this is a guide to help you avoid plagiarism.

## 10 reasons people plagiarize

- 1) **Writer's cramp** -- can't seem to find the right words, like someone else's words better because they say exactly what you would like to say.
- 2) **Cutting and pasting from Internet** -- it is easy to do and we usually do it in a hurry and then forget to copy the web address. Then, when we're ready to cite, we can't find the site.
- 3) **Paraphrasing** -- thinking that changing 2 or 3 words in a paragraph makes it your own words. Not so!
- 4) **Quotations** -- forgetting to use quotations marks or presenting the quote as your own words.
- 5) **Thinking copyright doesn't apply to the Web** -- assuming that everything on the Web is a free-for-all.
- 6) **Reposting entire articles** -- on the Web, you are allowed to use excerpts from articles if you cite the source, but you may not copy and paste an entire article on your own page or a message board.
- 7) **Procrastination** -- this is one of the biggest reasons for plagiarizing. When we're rushed to get something done, we skip steps or lack the time it takes to look through our notes to find where a piece of information came from.
- 8) **Lack of organization** -- unorganized notes or notes that lack essential pieces of information (like page numbers) make it easy to plagiarize.

**9) Failing to think critically** -- when you write, you need to be adding your own opinions, analysis, and conclusions based on the research. Do not rely solely on what other people think.

**10) Failing to ask for help** – instructors would much rather you ask for help than turn in a plagiarized paper. There is nothing wrong with admitting that you don't know how to paraphrase or cite a source. Just ask!

## What to cite

- Any words or ideas you read in a magazine, journal, newspaper, book, web page, letter, advertisement, government document, or other printed material that is not common knowledge.
- Any new information you gain through conversations or interviews via phone, email, chatting, or face-to-face.
- Any diagrams, illustrations, charts, pictures, or other visual material you use that was created by anyone other than yourself.

## What not to cite

- Your own life experiences, observations, and insights.
- Your own results from labs, personal studies, or field experiments.
- Your own artwork, digital photographs, video and audio.
- Common knowledge

## What is common knowledge?

You do not need to cite every little fact. Everyone knows that Abraham Lincoln was the 16th president and that America's Independence Day is July 4. Generally, if you knew a piece of information before you started doing your research, or it is a well-known fact, you do not need to cite it. Nor do you need to cite generally-accepted ideas, such as "Disneyworld is a child's dream come true" or "teenage pregnancy is a serious problem in the United States."

## Paraphrasing

Here's where it gets tricky. You have probably heard your instructors tell you that you must PARAPHRASE. This is hard to do, especially if you struggle with writing. It's so much easier to just insert what someone else says.

Paraphrasing is restating a sentence or paragraph in your own words without losing the message or meaning. Different words, same meaning. Paraphrasing is more than just changing or eliminating 2 or 3 words in a sentence or paragraph. The writing must sound like YOUR OWN writing.

**TIP** If you have trouble paraphrasing, here is a trick: Read the paragraph in the source to find out what the author is saying. Make sure you understand the meaning of the sentence or paragraph. Then, without looking at the source, rewrite it in your own words. Then, check to make sure that what you wrote has the same meaning as what the author wrote.

## Example of Paraphrasing

The paragraph below is an excerpt from CanWest News Service; Montreal Gazette, written by Aaron Derfel.

**ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S WRITING** -- In the study of 534 youngsters aged 10 to 12, the Universite de Montreal researchers found that 58 percent of boys eat once in a while or everyday in their bedroom, compared with 48 percent of girls.

**FIRST ATTEMPT TO PARAPHRASE** -- In a study of 534 youngsters, researchers concluded that 58 percent of boys eat once in a while or everyday in their bedroom, while 48 percent of girls do.

This is bad paraphrasing because the only difference is a few words were eliminated and two words were changed. It basically says exactly what the original author wrote.

**SECOND ATTEMPT** – Canadian researchers found that of the youngsters they studied, 534 between the ages of 10 and 12 eat in their rooms once in a while or everyday, primarily boys.

This is awful paraphrasing because the facts and figures are wrong. First, only 58% of boys and 48% of girls in a study of 534 ate in their rooms, not the entire 534 children. Also, saying that it is primarily boys who eat in their rooms is a distortion of the facts. Only 10% more boys than girls eat in their rooms.

**THIRD TRY** -- A study conducted by Canadian researchers at the Universite de Montreal found that out of 534 studied, 58% of boys and 48% of girls ages 10-12 eat in their rooms.

This is much better because it rewords the information without changing the meaning or messing up the facts.

**REMEMBER** – Even when you paraphrase someone’s words, you still must cite the source. You just don’t have to put the information in quotes.

## Summarizing

What’s the difference between paraphrasing and summarizing? Paraphrasing is taking a sentence or paragraph and rewording it. Summarizing is writing a shorter version of a longer piece of writing. The summary captures all of the most important parts of the original, but expresses them in a [much] shorter space.

Here is an example taken from <http://www.eff.org/Censorship/>

**ORIGINAL AUTHOR’S WRITING:** Under the guise of protecting children from sexual and "offensive" material, the government has repeatedly embraced overreaching policies that chill lawful speech. In *ACLU v. Reno*, EFF and a coalition of public interest groups achieved a landmark victory by successfully challenging the unconstitutional Communications Decency Act. The U.S. Supreme Court’s unanimous decision affirmed that online speech deserves the full protection of the First Amendment. EFF continues to fight related censorship policies today.

**SUMMARIZED** – The Communications Decency Act that restricted freedom of speech was unanimously overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in *ACLU v. Reno*, a case involving “offensive” material online.

**NOTE:** This is a short example of summarizing. Summarizing is usually used when you need to condense an entire article into one paragraph.

## How to write a paper that's more than a compilation of sources

By now you might be thinking that if you cite everything, your paper will be nothing but citations and quotes. If you paid attention in your Critical Thinking class, you know how to make a paper more than citations and quotes.

Be critical of other people's ideas. Pretend you are in front of a classroom debating an issue with an opponent. Take a stand on the issue. Think about what information authors may not have considered. Question those statistics you found. Disagree with quotes.

Remember that instructors assign papers so that you will learn something about your topic and question the validity of other people's opinions and so-called facts. Show your instructor what you've learned by inserting your own thoughts and analysis of the information.

## Examples of Critical Thinking

This is an excerpt taken from <http://usliberals.about.com/od/environmentalconcerns/p/KyotoProtocol.htm>. It is about President Bush's action (or inaction) on global warming. The Kyoto Protocol helps decrease carbon dioxide emissions.

**ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S WRITING:** George Bush made campaign promises in 2000 to regulate carbon dioxide as a pollutant. However, in 2001, George Bush pulled the US out of the Kyoto accords as one of the first acts of his presidency. Bush dismissed Kyoto Protocol as too costly, describing it as "an unrealistic and ever-tightening straitjacket." Lately, the White House has even questioned the validity of the science behind global warming, and claims that millions of jobs will be lost if the US joins in this world pact.

**Let's say you put this excerpt into your research paper. What would you say to add your own analysis? Here are two examples.**

### YOUR COMMENTARY / ANALYSIS -- The conservative viewpoint

1) President Bush's policy on global warming may not be the ideal policy but is necessary at this time. If the U.S. signs the Kyoto Agreement, American businesses will pay the price. We cannot compete with countries like China and India, two countries in the middle of an economic boom, if they don't also regulate their emissions. President Bush should be commended for protecting American corporate interests.

### YOUR COMMENTARY / ANALYSIS -- The liberal viewpoint

2) It is shameful that President Bush pulled out of the Kyoto accords after promising to regulate carbon dioxide emissions in his campaign. The U.S. has only 4 percent of the world's population and yet is responsible for 25% of all carbon dioxide emissions worldwide (cite). We are the biggest polluter in the world, and we are certainly wealthy enough to afford policies that regulate greenhouse gas emissions. The U.S. should be setting the example for other countries. President Bush's policy has him appearing like the puppet of American corporations.

## Get Organized!

A minute here saves an hour there. You can avoid plagiarizing by spending a little extra time when you do your research. Copying a web address as you copy a quote will help when you need to cite that quote. Writing down a page number as you pull a quote from a book could save you searching through the entire book later. Printing out an article while you copy and paste text... you'll be thankful later.

## Keep sources straight

We all have our own form of organization. There is no right or wrong way to get organized as long as you don't lose important material or plagiarize. Here are some steps recommended by the librarian.

- 1) Find all your sources first. (It's ok to go back later and find more sources.)
- 2) Read and highlight material you think will be useful for your topic (but do not mark on library books!!!!). In books, write down quotes or paraphrase material and note the page number. Or, you can write down just the page number and paragraph and come back to it.
- 3) Make your reference page BEFORE you write your paper. This will make it easier to cite your sources in the text of your paper.
- 4) Number your sources on the reference page. Then write that number on the actual article printout, website printout, or book (on a post-it note stuck to the inside cover).
- 5) When you begin writing, have your reference page next to you. When you insert quotes, statistics, paraphrased material, summaries, charts and graphs, you can quickly find where it comes from on your reference page. You can then either insert the number of the reference next to your sentence/paragraph that needs cited (to go back later and insert the actual reference), or you can just insert the actual reference at this time.

Remember, if in doubt, ask your instructors. They will be happy to answer questions about plagiarism.