



Plagiarism

What it is and how to avoid it

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct that usually involves presenting borrowed ideas or wording as if they were your own. If you are charged with plagiarism, you can fail an assignment, fail a course or be suspended from university.

All of the following constitute plagiarism:

- **Using ideas or information from published material without citing the source in your paper – even when you present this material in your own words or you include your sources in a reference list at the end of the paper.**
Note: an exception is information that is common knowledge; for example, you need not cite well-known scientific or historical facts.
- **Using wording from published material in your work without using quotation marks (or inseting long quotations) or without acknowledging the source.**
Note: When putting borrowed information into your own words, do not rely on the sentence structure of the original and simply substitute words here and there – that is also plagiarism.
- **Submitting written work in a course that you have submitted in another course** (unless you have explicit permission from your instructors).
- **Submitting written work entirely (or almost entirely) copied from other sources; passing off the work of others as your own** (e.g., copying someone else's work or paying someone to write a paper for you).

Q & A

I often have someone look over my work and tell me if they think my paper is clear or if they see any obvious problems – would that be considered plagiarism?

Unless you're writing a take-home exam, you should feel free to discuss your ideas with others and have someone review your written work to point out weaknesses and typos. These practices do not constitute plagiarism as long as you – not your reviewer – do any required rewriting.

I often just change the words in the quotes to synonyms. Is this a problem?

Yes! To paraphrase a source you need to ensure that you don't use the same words, the same sentence structure or the same order of ideas. Focusing on larger ideas, rather than on one sentence of text will make this more feasible.

I often cut and paste from my sources to create an outline for my paper. What if I'm not aware of my plagiarism?

Intentionality is not an issue. It is the commitment of plagiarism that matters. When cutting and pasting from sources, it is easy to forget that these are not your words. By focusing on note-taking and paraphrasing sources, this kind of plagiarism can be avoided.

If I'm afraid of plagiarising, should I always put borrowed material from the sources I use in quotations, not paraphrases?

Quotations should be used sparingly. You don't want to overwhelm your reader with a patchwork essay. By paraphrasing your sources following the steps below, you can integrate sources into your paper by not using the same words, sentence structure, or order of ideas of a particular source.

Avoid Plagiarism with Proper Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing requires the writer to summarize someone else's work, while avoiding the original words and organization. It demands *analysis* and *synthesis*. Therefore, it is important to understand the different context of your written work and that of your sources. Are you expected to sound like the articles you are reading? No!

1. Read the excerpt for its abstraction or gist. The gist captures the point or main idea of a section of the article. The gist is a pliable way to draw on the ideas of the article, in a way that is ready to be used in your own work. The gist of the article is based on the article's contribution to knowledge in the field.
2. Look for keywords or phrases. These may be "prestige abstractions" meaning that they are certain terms used by the larger scholarly community. Including "prestige abstractions" can create a stronger connection between your paraphrase and the original work. Make sure you understand any terms or phrases that you use. If the terminology is commonly used, you may include it. If the term was unfamiliar to you before your research, you probably should provide a brief definition. If you are unsure, always quote it.
3. Do NOT look at the article when paraphrasing. It's too tempting to repeat words. Open a new window, or flip over the paper and write what you remember. If you do this throughout reading any article, you'll have a set of paraphrases before you sit down to write the assignment.
4. Frame the paraphrase with the author's name and a verb (Smith argues). By having people in your sentence, you can avoid sounding like an omnipotent narrator. It is more likely to focus you on the big picture, rather than stating percentages and details.
5. Imagine it as part of a larger work. Your paraphrases should serve your purpose. Why are you including this information in your paper? Make sure it is explicit to your reader. Don't expect that they will figure it out because you put it in a particular spot.
6. Don't forget to include the appropriate citation.

What is the proper way to document sources?

Check with your instructors for their preferences; standard documentation guides include

- *MLA Handbook* (for English and some Humanities)
- *Chicago Manual of Style* (for History – footnote style).
- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (for Psychology, Nursing and some other Social Sciences)
- *The ACS Style Guide* (for Chemistry)
- *CBE Style Manual* (for Biology)
- *IEEE Editorial Style Guide* (for Engineering)
- *Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals* known as Vancouver Style (for Medicine)