# A student guide to plagiarism

## Defining plagiarism

The first step in avoiding plagiarism is understanding what it is.

Plagiarism is "an act or instance of plagiarizing" (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary); therefore, the real definition we are looking for is what it means to *plagiarize*. Here is my (this author's) dictionary-style definition:

> To plagiarize is to represent, purposely or inadvertently, someone's language (the expression of their ideas), as your own original thought.

If we boil that definition down: To plagiarize is to use someone's words as yours.

Plagiarism is stealing. Plagiarism is literary theft. It can occur in a term paper, journal article, book, a play, lyrics to a song, or a computer program. Plagiarism can be a form of copyright violation. Plagiarism can be a criminal offense. Plagiarism is always a form of academic dishonesty and is never acceptable.

In part, Troy University Standards of Conduct state, "A student or organization may be disciplined, up to and including suspension and expulsion, if deemed in violation of the STANDARDS OF CONDUCT for the commission of or the attempt to commit any of the following offenses: 1. Dishonesty, such as cheating, plagiarism . . ." (Troy University, p. 9).

The following five points will help to clarify what plagiarism is.

**Point one:** The issue at the heart of plagiarism is that the writer should take credit only for his or her own work, both in terms of ideas, and the manner in which they are presented. The parts of a document that are original to the writer do not require any type of citation; it is, in effect, the lack of a citation that tells the reader "I (the writer) am taking credit for this idea and how it is presented." Anything that is not original to the author at the time of writing must be cited—giving credit where credit is due. In practical terms, this is done by placing citations within the paper to tell the reader where you found your information. Citations point the reader to a list of references (at the end of the paper) which fully details the sources used.

You must document (provide citations and reference for) sources that you paraphrase or summarize. Additionally, to avoid plagiarizing your sources, you must paraphrase or summarize in your own language (words/writing style); you cannot simply restate the information in just about the same way as it was originally presented, or how someone else summarized it.

You must document sources that you quote. If you are directly quoting the original material, you must put quotation marks around the quote to indicate that that is a direct quotation (see note on long quotes, just below). On the other hand, you cannot represent, using quotation marks, something that is not a direct, word-for-word quote, as if it were.

Note on long quotes:

Standard style manuals, such as those listed on page 4 of this guide, used for writing college papers, prescribe various methods for using *block quotes*—a technique used to set off the text of long quotes from the main text.

A long quote is defined as follows (Which one you go by will depend on the writing style prescribed to you by your instructor):

American Psychological Association guidelines: forty words or more (American Psychological Association, 2009, p. 171).

Modern Language Association guidelines: four or more lines of your paper (MLA Handbook, 2009, p. 94).

Chicago guidelines: "Quoted material, of more than a paragraph, even if very brief, is best set off as block quotation" (*Chicago Manual of Style*, 2010, p. 627).

Turabian guidelines: five or more lines of your paper (Turabian, Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2007, p. 350).

**Point two:** Plagiarism is plagiarism whether it is done intentionally or not. If the writing comes across as yours, but it isn't, it is plagiarism. It doesn't matter whether you meant to do it or not; that is why it is so important for students to learn the proper methods of citing their references, and to develop good research skills—skills that not only promote good scholarship, but that also help reduce the occurrence of plagiarism.

If you accidentally forget to cite a source, you are essentially stating that the concept, and how you present it, is yours—and are committing plagiarism; that is why it is imperative always to document your sources.

Improperly paraphrasing or summarizing a documented source is plagiarism. Documentation tells the reader that the idea was not yours, but, if the expression (language/style) of the idea is essentially the same as the source, you are not properly paraphrasing, and you are implying that the expression of the idea is yours, when it is not. See #16 on page 6 of this guide for assistance with paraphrasing and summarizing.

If you use a direct quotation but do not put quotation marks around it, that is plagiarism, even if you do cite the reference. Without the quotation marks, you are essentially stating that what you have written is your paraphrase or summary of the referenced source.

Purposely or accidentally indicating something is a direct quote (by the use of quotation marks), when it is not, is extremely poor scholarship if done accidentally, and, if done purposely, is a form of dishonesty.

**Point three:** Many definitions use the term *someone else's* in reference to the source you are plagiarizing. This is not completely accurate, as one type of plagiarism is self-plagiarism, sometimes referred to as auto-plagiarism.

An example of self-plagiarism is an author who presents, as new, material that they have previously published. It is not plagiarism to use material you previously published as long as you properly cite that work; for example, in his article "Cognitive science and behaviorism," B.F. Skinner cites himself four times; twice to his own journal articles (1950 and 1984), and twice to his books (1957 and 1968). If he had not cited himself, the reader would be led to believe (intentionally or not) that the concepts he was presenting were new (Skinner, 1989).

An example of another type of self-plagiarism is undocumented or unauthorized dual publication—the simultaneous publication of the same essential material in more than one place, e.g., in two separate journals without the approval of the publishers and notice to the readers. There are instances of legitimate and useful dual publication (or reproduction), but to do so in a deceptive manner, one which misrepresents your scholarship, is plagiarism.

Another type of self-plagiarism is a student reusing their own paper, or a modified version thereof, without permission of the instructor(s). This could mean recycling a paper they pre-

viously turned in, or writing one paper to satisfy the requirements of two concurrent assignments. Whereas some definitions of plagiarism would not apply here, since the student is not representing someone else's work (or their previous work) as their own, many instructors and institutions may choose to classify such actions as plagiarism. In any case, unauthorized recycling is an act of dishonesty and is always unacceptable.

**Point four:** Some definitions of plagiarism state that it is using someone else's work without their permission. While this statement is true in some respects, it is still plagiarism to use someone else's work as your own even if you have permission. For example, if your friend lets you use their old term paper on *Huckleberry Finn*, it is still plagiarism; you are representing work that is not yours as though it were. This type of plagiarism is often referred to as collusion. Similarly, it is plagiarism to use, without reference, material that is in the public domain, not copyrighted, etc.

**Point five:** Additional reading.

Title:          Plagiarize
Content:       Definition (as follows): "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as    one's own : use (another's production) without crediting the source : to commit literary theft : present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source"
Source:        Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary
Address:       http://www.m-w.com (search on *plagiarize*)

Title:          What is Plagiarism at Indiana University?
Content:       Definition and a short lesson to help the reader understand what is or is not plagiarism.
Source:        Ted Frick (Indiana University, Bloomington)
Address:       https://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/index2.html

### How students can avoid plagiarizing

1. Realize that you, the student, are responsible for avoiding plagiarism in your work, whether it is intentional or accidental.
2. Start by understanding what plagiarism is. Review the *Defining Plagiarism* section of this publication and the additional readings linked there.
3. Know how your individual instructor or institution defines plagiarism and what the penalties are for plagiarizing. You may have an individual grade reduced, you may receive a failing grade for a class, or you may be expelled from the University.
4. Know what your instructor expects in terms of reference and citation formats. See item five (next item).
5. Purchase the most recent edition of the appropriate style guide or use one at a local library. Note: This information was checked in January 23, 2012, but you should not purchase/use one of these sources until you make sure that it is still the most recent edition.
    o For American Psychological Association (APA): *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Sixth Edition.
    o For Modern Language Association (MLA): *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Seventh Edition.
    o For Turabian: *Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Seventh Edition.
    o Additionally, the writing guide *A Writer's Reference* (by Diana Hacker), is often required or recommended reading for composition and literature classes, contains sections that summarize the basics of APA and MLA documentation style.
    o Citing electronic resources, e.g., online databases or Internet sites, is often a difficult process that is only briefly covered in the aforementioned guides. Therefore, to assist you in this process, the Library provides a formal guide, *Citing the World Wide Web in Style*. It is linked from the TROY Library site in the *Information and Help* section.
    o Troy University has a Writing Center <http://troy.troy.edu/writingcenter>. Note that several of its handouts, although not a substitute for the books listed above, are designed to assist you with APA and MLA style.
6. Web sites that purport to present guides to citation style are frequently inaccurate, incomplete, and out of date; that is why it is recommended that you use the current, print resource (book) as your style guide. A select list of recommended online sources is linked within each section (APA, MLA, Chicago/Turabian), of this Library's guide, *Citing the World Wide Web in Style*.
7. Remember that your instructors and library personnel are there to help you. They cannot research or write your paper for you, but they are there to point you in the right direction and help you obtain the research material you need.
8. Avoid these types of plagiarism: Never purchase, copy, or steal a paper, or hire someone to write it. Do not make up or otherwise falsify references. Do not recycle a paper you have previously or are currently writing (self-plagiarism is still plagiarism). Don't write the paper and then, after the fact, fill in sources that fit just to meet the assignment requirements. Write the paper from the sources.
9. Do not contribute to plagiarism by others. Do not lend or sell your papers. Beware of unscrupulous services, e.g., Web sites, that offer to "check your paper for plagiarism;" they may be copying your paper to sell to others. Troy University uses a bona fide service named TurnItIn (see point 19, below).
10. Never forget to check your references. Make sure you are citing everything that needs to be cited, and that the reference is pointing to the correct source in your works cited list. *A Syllabus Strategy for*

*Talking About Plagiarism with Students* offers a clever idea ... in draft form, color code the sections of text of your paper with their corresponding reference on the works cited page. Then, when you are finally ready to turn your paper in, simply change all of the text to black. As an example of this, you can see that text of the idea I obtained from a source other than myself is color-coordinated with its source (in the source list on page 8). In this case, the text and its reference are both brown. This tells me (as I write) that I need to make sure that this section has a reference, and helps me easily locate and verify that I am using the correct reference (Carbone, n.d.).

11. If possible, have your instructor review a draft of your paper before you turn it in.

12. Allow enough time to do proper research and write your paper. If circumstances arise that will prevent you from researching and writing your paper by the time it is due, ask your instructor to grant you an extension.

13. Learn how to use your Library and perform research effectively. Writing a paper is like baking a cake; if you want it to turn out well, you have to start with the right ingredients (sources).

14. Know what you do not need to cite.
    o You never need to cite your own experiences, thoughts, opinions, conclusions, beliefs, feelings, etc. You would, however, cite yourself if you are quoting words or ideas that you have formally presented in a book, article, speech, interview, etc.
    o You do not need to cite information that is common knowledge; generally accepted fact; well-known sayings; mythology; folklore; or literary references. This can also include specialized knowledge that you assume your target audience will have; for example, you can take it for granted that your quantum mechanics instructor is familiar with the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, even though the public is not. If in doubt as to whether or not something is common knowledge (and does not need to be cited), check with your instructor, or just cite it. Gretchen Pearson, author of *Electronic Plagiarism Seminar*, says that to consider something common knowledge, it should be "facts which can be verified in a number of places and are likely to be known by a large number of people. Both must apply—if you didn't know it, and had to look it up, you should cite it" (Pearson, 2005).

15. Paraphrasing, summarizing, and quoting are each very different from one another other. Learn when and how to paraphrase, summarize, and quote. Selected resources:
    o Quoting, Paraphrasing, Summarizing (PDF Document)
    <http://troy.troy.edu/writingcenter/pdfhandouts/QuotingParaphrasingSummarizing.pdf>
    From the Troy University Writing Center.
    o Paraphrasing textual material
    <http://www.library.arizona.edu/help/tutorials/plagiarism/index.html> from University of Arizona. An excellent, detailed guide. Look at the Paraphrasing tab and watch the video linked under the Tutorials tab.
    o How to Recognize Plagiarism <http://www.indiana.edu/~istd/example1paraphrasing.html> (word-for-word examples section), How to Recognize Plagiarism
    <http://www.indiana.edu/~istd/examples.html> (paraphrasing examples section), and a self-test <http://www.indiana.edu/~istd/test.html> from Indiana University Bloomington.
    o Using sources <http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/sources.html> Hamilton College. A perfect guide to when and how to use direct quotations and paraphrasing.
    o Paraphrase: Write it in Your Own Words
    <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/01> from the Purdue University Online Writing Lab.

- o How to avoid plagiarism. <http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/plagiarism.html> A wide variety of examples with explanations.
- o Paraphrase and summary <http://www.utoronto.ca/ucwriting/paraphrase.html> from University of Toronto, University College Writing workshop Handouts on Writing.
- o Using quotations <http://www.utoronto.ca/ucwriting/quotations.html> from University of Toronto, University College Writing workshop Handouts on Writing.
- o Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/01> from the Purdue University Online Writing Lab.

16. Keep a record of your research.
- o Record the full citation (author, title, date, etc.) for each of your sources (books, articles, Web sites). Retain copies, print or electronic, of your sources, e.g., journal articles or Internet sources. If you use an eBook (electronic book), know where you obtained it (library/database). For print books, record your source for the book, e.g., the Library and call number.
- o Record from what libraries, databases, Web site, etc., you obtained your sources.
- o Keep copies of your paper as it develops—your outline, your research (described above), and each version/draft, of your paper. Quick explanation: If your instructor thinks your paper is not your own work, you will have evidence of your creative process. Likewise, keeping copies of papers you have written for other classes will offer your instructor something to compare if they have reason to doubt that you wrote your paper, e.g., if they think it is too well written or that it does not match your writing style. Keeping print and electronic drafts of your paper can also be invaluable if the latest version of your paper is lost ... either physically and/or electronically.

17. Judge your sources carefully, especially those from the Internet. Avoid sources that have a high potential to lead you to plagiarize inadvertently, i.e., sources that you used (and cited) that you thought contained original information, but were really rip-offs of the true source. An example of this would be a poorly documented or questionable Web site. An excellent guide to evaluating sources, both print and electronic, is available at the TROY Global Campus Library site http://uclibrary.troy.edu in the *Information and Help* section.

18. Don't use phantom references, e.g., don't cite a book or article as if you actually used (read) it, when what you really did was read what an abstract, article or another book says about it, especially if that source is an Internet site. Those times that you do use a source such as an abstract (from a reliable source) of an article, cite it correctly, as what it is (an abstract, etc.).

19. Use the University-provided plagiarism detection software TurnItIn. Check with your individual instructors regarding TurnItIn.

20. Learn from your graded papers. Review them to see where your writing or citing style can be improved.

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