

## Plagiarism: What is it?

Plagiarism means taking the words and thoughts of others (their ideas, concepts, images, sentences, and so forth) and using them as if they were your own, without crediting the author or citing the source. Most plagiarism is willful, a sort of theft. It is possible to plagiarize unintentionally, though, by being careless or hurried, omitting quotation marks or slipping into the words or ideas of others through inattention or simply for convenience. Whether you meant it or not, you can be found guilty of plagiarism whenever other people's language gets used without proper citation in your text. At this and most other universities, plagiarism is regarded as intellectual theft; faculty will rarely bother to determine whether you stole words on purpose or walked out of the shop having forgotten to pay.

This is how the faculty and students at UK have defined plagiarism (from Senate Rule 6.3.1):

*All academic work, written or otherwise, submitted by students to their instructors or other academic supervisors, is expected to be the result of their own thought, research or self-expression...*

*When students submit work purporting to be their own, but which in any way borrows ideas, organization, wording or anything else from another source without appropriate acknowledgment of the fact, the students are guilty of plagiarism.*

*Plagiarism includes reproducing someone else's work, whether it be published article, chapter of a book, a paper from a friend or some file, or whatever. Plagiarism also includes the practice of employing another person to alter or revise the work which a student submits as his/her own, whoever that other person may be. Students may discuss assignments among themselves or with an instructor or tutor, but when the actual work is done, it must be done by the student, and the student alone.*

*When a student's assignment involves research in outside sources or information, the student must carefully acknowledge exactly what, where and how he/she has employed them. If the words of someone else are used, the student must put quotation marks around the passage in question and add an appropriate indication of its origin. Making simple changes while leaving the organization, content and phraseology intact is plagiaristic. However, nothing in these Rules shall apply to those ideas which are so generally and freely circulated as to be a part of the public domain.*

Plagiarism is found in all of the following examples:

- Purchasing or copying a paper from the Internet
- Borrowing your roommate's lab report and using his or her description of the experiment to describe your findings
- Turning in a paper as your own that you didn't write
- Copying (cutting and pasting) material without acknowledging the source
- Using material when an author has been identified but not using quotation

- marks to reflect his or her original words  
Inadequate paraphrasing

Each of these points will be discussed below, but first let's consider why the academic community is so opposed to plagiarism.

Unlike a factory that produces snow tires or surf boards, ideas are the product that faculty and their students produce. Sometimes these ideas become patented or copyrighted; they may become poems or novels; designs for stunning buildings or new medicines. When a faculty member assigns a paper or project, the expectation is that students will read and do research and ultimately come up with some individual way of demonstrating that they have used their minds to create an intellectual product of their own. Students who take shortcuts and pretend that someone else's work is their own, shortchange not only themselves but also commit an academic crime...almost like selling a stolen laptop. Many faculty see the stealing of ideas and prose of others as just that serious. In most universities, plagiarism is viewed as an academic felony -- not a misdemeanor.

**Question:** Why is using material from the Internet without attribution so wrong? After all, web developers do it all the time.

**Answer:** When a student pretends that a material is his or her own when it isn't, the student is deliberately misrepresenting...lying about the authorship. Faculty hold students accountable because it is their job to do so. Students are held to a "higher standard" than web page developers.

**Question:** Why is using a lab partner or roommate's lab report to write my own lab report wrong?

**Answer:** It constitutes plagiarism because if you use the same words and sentences, then you didn't write your lab report. What faculty are trying to assess is what *you* learned from the experiment, what observations *you* made, what vocabulary terms *you* feel comfortable using. While you may feel at times that lab reports are busywork, their purpose is to help you learn. Using part of your lab partner or roommate's report as your own prevents the faculty member from getting an accurate assessment of what you gained from the experiment. Pretending that you got something that you didn't is a form of cheating.

**Question:** Why is turning in a paper I didn't write so awful? After all, I know that I can write well -- I've always received good grades for my papers.

**Answer:** Let's suppose you are a surgeon. Further, you are an excellent surgeon and your patients always appreciate your skill. Let's say next week that you want to take the day off but scheduling conflicts prevent that because the operating rooms are already booked under your name. So let's say you allow your roommate or friend to pose as you and to perform the operations under your name. The legal issues aside, wouldn't that be morally wrong because of the deceit involved? Similarly, just because you believe you write well does not mean that you have the right to turn in a paper that someone else has written-- that is just as deceitful.

**Question:** Why are faculty so uptight about students always acknowledging their sources?

**Answer:** This question gets us back to faculty's responsibility to fairly evaluate your intellectual products. If you don't acknowledge your sources properly, then what happens is that the reader may think that you wrote something brilliant that you didn't. And how should a faculty grade you as a student for someone else's ideas? If you deliberately want your instructor to think that you wrote something that you didn't, then you are being dishonest.

**Question:** Why is it so important to use quotation marks...especially when I've already identified the author earlier in a paragraph?

**Answer:** Any time you use the original words or ideas that you did not write or create yourself, you must acknowledge the author. The problem comes when the reader of your paper can not tell where your writing stops or starts – when the reader can't tell what is original with you and what is original with another author. Quotation marks and double-indenting (with longer passages) are the mechanisms you must use as a skilled writer to let your reader identify the material that you didn't write. Sometimes you might not need quotation marks if you are able to paraphrase. More about that later.

**Question:** What is bad paraphrasing?

**Answer:** Bad paraphrasing is when the passage or material that you have borrowed and restated is too close to the original. That is, you are using too many of the original author's words: you didn't change them enough. Tips on how to avoid this problem are provided below.

## Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism

1. Every time you print out material from the Internet, always make sure that you get the full source so that you can cite it later. If you use note cards when you read books and journal articles, take the time to list the full source including page numbers on the passages that you copy.
2. Whenever you cut and paste from the Internet into a document that you are creating, highlight it in another color so that it sticks out. Later, when you are polishing your draft, you can decide if you have too many direct quotations and can view the sections you have highlighted to see if some can be paraphrased.
3. Don't assume that there is some magical number of words or sentences that you can "borrow" without being caught or accused of plagiarism. Sometimes it is not the length of a passage but a clever phrasing that sticks out and gets imbedded in one's memory. For instance, in 1989 a writer by the name of Maeder for an article for the *Atlantic Monthly* used the phrase the "wounded healer" to discuss his thesis that many of those entering the helping professions may be attracted to careers in psychotherapy, nursing, the ministry and so forth because of less than healthy family functioning while they were children. If you used just those two words, *wounded healer*, and pretended that they were original with you, then you have committed plagiarism. Students are often attracted to terms and expressions that have a verbal punch or

are expressed so eloquently that anyone would be glad to take credit for them. For those ideas or sentences, be especially careful to use quotation marks and full acknowledgment.

4. Don't misrepresent, pretend, or purport that ideas are yours when they aren't.
5. Don't copy material, say, three paragraphs, from an original source and indicate at the end of the third paragraph with a footnote that the material was borrowed. The reader must know at the beginning of the first sentence of the first paragraph that you are not the author of the next three paragraphs.
6. If you use material verbatim (the exact words), then use quotation marks and cite the source.
7. Before submitting your paper to an instructor (even a draft!) make sure that any outside material you have inserted has been properly credited and that direct quotes contain quotation marks around them. Remember that graphs, tables, figures, formulae and other visual representations that you acquire must also be identified as to their source. Take the time to proofread and to look for errors!

## Paraphrasing

**Question:** What is paraphrasing?

**Answer:** Paraphrasing is using your own words to express the ideas or thoughts contained in a passage that you have read. The notion here is that your unique way of speaking or writing will capture the essence of the passage without it sounding like the author. Therefore, in good paraphrasing your organizational structure or lead-off sentence might not resemble the material that you are summarizing. A good paraphrase is more like an abstract than a mirror image of the original.

**Question:** What would be an example of a bad paraphrase?

**Answer:** In 1995 Thomas Childers wrote a book (Wings of Morning: The Story of the Last American Bomber Shot Down Over Germany in World War II) and he wrote this passage:

*Up, up, up, groping through the clouds for what seemed like an eternity...No amount of practice could have prepared them for what they encountered, B-24s, glittering like mica, were popping up out of the clouds all over the sky.*

In 2001 the historian Stephen Ambrose published his book (The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s Over Germany) containing this passage:

*Up, up, up, he went, until he got above the clouds. No amount of practice could have prepared the pilot and crew for what they encountered — B-24s, glittering like mica, were popping up out of clouds over here, over there, everywhere.*

As you can see, although a few words have been changed, Ambrose's version is so close to the original that he was accused of plagiarism. A bad paraphrase is plagiarism! (This

example came from Fred Barnes' article entitled, "Stephen Ambrose, Copycat" that appeared in the Daily Standard and was retrieved from [www.weeklystandard.com](http://www.weeklystandard.com) on 9/4/03.)

**Question:** What do you do when there is no good way to restate a passage that you want to use in your paper?

**Answer:** When it is not possible to summarize a passage without losing its eloquence or power or to phrase it differently to convey the same idea, then you should use direct quotation marks and fully cite your source.

**Question:** If I paraphrase a passage, am I required to cite it as well?

**Answer:** Yes, if you paraphrase you still need to acknowledge the original source.

## Good and Bad Paraphrasing Examples

### Original:

"I am a teacher at heart, and there are moments in the classroom when I can hardly hold the joy. When my students and I discover uncharted territory to explore, when the pathway out of a thicket opens up before us, when our experience is illumined by the lightning-life of the mind – then teaching is the finest work I know." Parker Palmer (1998), *The Courage to Teach*.

### Bad Paraphrase:

Palmer says that he is a teacher at heart and that there are many moments when he can scarcely contain his joy. He believes teaching is the finest work he knows when he and his students discover uncharted territories to explore and they emerge out of some tangle --their pathway illumined by lightning-like discoveries of their minds.

### Good Paraphrase:

For Palmer, teaching is immensely enjoyable. Especially when students and faculty are able to work through conundrums, he says claims that "teaching is the finest work I know" (p.1).

Diana Hacker, the author of The Bedford Handbook for Writers, offers this piece of advice on how to avoid plagiarizing an author. She says, "...close the book, write from memory, and then open the book to check for accuracy" (p. 479). Using this approach will result in your using your own words and your own natural writing style.

Hacker also recommends using "clear signal phrases" to indicate that you will be presenting outside material. Examples of signal phrases are:

"According to Prof. Smith..."

"In the words of nationally recognized expert Alan Smith..."

"Dr. Smith argues that..."

"Smith reports that..."

"Smith has concluded that..."

"Long-time researcher of this phenomenon, Alan Smith, has concluded that..."

## **Do I Have to Document Common Knowledge?**

Common knowledge is best thought of as facts known to many, if not most, people. For instance, you would not have to document that Kentucky became a state in 1792, that 98.6 is considered the average temperature of healthy adults, or that skunks have black and white stripes.

However, if you write this statement: “There are 65 species of animals that belong to the family Mustelidae which include weasels, martens, otters, and badgers” then you should provide appropriate documentation because the “count” of whether there are actually 64 or 66 species of animals in this family might be controversial. The number 65 might represent an earlier count that is no longer considered accurate. In other words, the exact count might depend upon which expert is speaking and therefore would not be common or convention knowledge – something known to most Americans.

If you are in doubt about whether to cite a source, then ask your instructor or someone whose judgment you trust about whether the material might be common knowledge.

## **What are the Penalties for Plagiarism at UK?**

Penalties range from a minimum penalty of a zero on the assignment for a first offense to an E in the course. In certain circumstances you can be given an XE grade which will become a permanent part of your transcript. You can also be suspended or expelled for plagiarism.

## **What Happens If I am Accused of Plagiarism?**

This is the process that faculty must follow when making an accusation of plagiarism:

1. The faculty member makes a “discovery” of plagiarism. That is, the faculty member finds evidence that he or she feels could support the charge of plagiarism.
2. You are informed of the charge and given an opportunity to state your case in a meeting with the instructor and chair of the department. At that meeting, you are also informed of the possible penalties that may be imposed or recommended.
4. If you cannot provide an acceptable explanation, the penalty is imposed. Depending upon the circumstances, the chair and instructor may recommend to the Dean of your college that you be suspended, dismissed, or expelled.
5. If you feel that you have been unfairly charged with plagiarism and wish to contest the charge, you can meet with the Academic Ombud. All students have the right to present their cases to the University Appeals Board if they feel that they are not guilty or if they feel that the penalty for their academic crime was too severe. Please note, once the charge of plagiarism has been made, you cannot withdraw or drop the course.

## **Additional Help and Resource**

Senate Rules which govern cheating and plagiarism as well as other guidelines pertaining to your rights as a student can be found on our web page. [www.uky.edu/ombud](http://www.uky.edu/ombud)

If you would like to talk with someone outside of your department or College in a

confidential setting about the academic integrity charges made against you, call the Academic Ombud at 257-3737.

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