

Plagiarism and Student Writing

Plagiarism, as defined by the Committee on Academic Conduct in the College of Arts and Sciences, is “using another’s words or ideas without proper citation.” The following information is also available at <http://depts.washington.edu/grading/issue1/honesty.htm>.

Plagiarism generally occurs in one of the following ways:

1. **Using another writer's words without proper citation.**

If you use another writer's words, you must place quotation marks around the quoted material and include a footnote or other indication of the source of the quotation.

2. **Using another writer's ideas without proper citation.**

When you use another author's ideas, you must indicate with footnotes or other means where this information can be found. Your instructors want to know which ideas and judgments are yours and which you arrived at by consulting other sources. Even if you arrived at the same judgment on your own, you need to acknowledge that the writer you consulted also came up with the idea.

3. **Citing your source but reproducing the exact words of a printed source without quotation marks.**

This makes it appear that you have paraphrased rather than borrowed the author's exact words.

4. **Borrowing the structure of another author's phrases or sentences without crediting the author from whom it came.**

This kind of plagiarism usually occurs out of laziness: it is easier to replicate another writer's style than to think about what you have read and then put it in your own words. The following example is from *A Writer's Reference* by Diane Hacker (New York, 1989, p. 11)

Original: If the existence of a signing ape was unsettling for linguists, it was also startling news for animal behaviorists.

Unacceptable borrowing of words: An ape who knew sign language unsettled linguists and startled animal behaviorists.

Unacceptable borrowing of sentence structure: If the presence of a sign-language-using chimp was disturbing for scientists studying language, it was also surprising to scientists studying animal behavior.

Acceptable paraphrasing: When they learned of an ape's ability to use sign language, both linguists and animal behaviorists were taken by surprise.

5. **Borrowing all or part of another student's paper or using someone else's outline to write your own paper.**

6. **Using a paper writing "service" or having a friend write the paper for you.**

Regardless of whether you pay a stranger or have a friend do it, it is a breach of academic honesty to hand in work that is not your own or to use parts of another student's paper.

Note: *The guidelines that define plagiarism also apply to information secured on internet websites. Internet references must specify precisely where the information was obtained and where it can be found.*

What Are the Consequences of Plagiarism at the University of Washington?

Instructors who believe they have discovered cheating will submit a grade of X (the equivalent of an unreported grade) for the course until the academic misconduct charge is resolved. A hold is placed on the student's registration if he or she fails to respond in a timely manner (within two weeks) to the written request that the student meet with the Dean's Representative for Academic Conduct. Students have the right to appear before the Committee to offer testimony. If found guilty, the Committee will sanction the student. More information about the sanctions can be found at <http://depts.washington.edu/grading/issue1/honesty.htm>.

How Do You Avoid Plagiarism?

- Understand your subject! Often students will want to recopy entire sections of a scientific paper—with or without crediting the original author—because they don't really understand what they are writing. If you can't put the information into your own words, you aren't ready to write about it. To learn how to paraphrase what you want to write, first try to explain it to someone else.
- Use others' ideas or writing as support for, not in place of, your own ideas. If your ideas come directly from another source, cite that source.
- When taking notes for a paper, always distinguish your ideas from those from the source you are reading. Establish a pattern and use it consistently. For example, write information obtained from another source in brackets or parentheses, and write your own ideas without brackets. Alternatively, use different ink colors or highlighters to distinguish between original and non-original ideas.
- Always paraphrase unless you are quoting directly. Rework an idea and shorten it. If the idea is new, or not common knowledge, make sure to cite the source in a footnote or in the body of your paper.

When Do You Use Quotation Marks?

- Use quotation marks whenever you are using someone else's words exactly, but use direct quotes sparingly (e.g., to support your point with the words of an authority, or when original wording is unusual, strong, or characteristic of the speaker). Writing in your own words, using a few quotes to strengthen your main points, shows that you understand your topic. Stringing quotes together suggests that you don't. Arguments made in scientific writing rarely focus on the specific words used in the source material—unlike arguments made in literary criticism, for example—so students may find that they use quotes less often in scientific papers.

When Do You Use Footnotes or Citations?

- Any time that you quote someone, you must refer to the source and exact page number. If you are paraphrasing another writer's ideas or opinions, or information that is not common knowledge, you must cite the source. Citations are important, not only because they give credit to the original author, but also because they allow your reader to find the original information.

References

Committee on Academic Conduct in the College of Arts and Sciences. "Academic Honesty: Cheating and Plagiarism." *UW's Faculty Resource on Grading*, <http://depts.washington.edu/grading/issue1/honesty.htm> (Accessed September 24, 2008)

Hacker, D. *A Writer's Reference*. New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1989.