

WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

The common definition of plagiarism is *taking someone else's ideas, words, or expressions and presenting them as your own.*

Plagiarism can be intentional or deliberate (i.e., you know that you are doing it – for example, turning in a paper that you did not write or copying something word for word and presenting it as your own work); or unintentional (i.e., you did not realize that you had to give credit for the information).

Plagiarism can have very serious consequences, whether it is intentional or unintentional. You may fail the assignment or class, or even be suspended. At the very least, you have cheated and probably damaged your relationship with the instructor. Also, when you plagiarize during your professional career, you could lose your job and seriously damage your reputation.

How do you know when to document, acknowledge, or credit a source? You usually do not need to document common knowledge or your own thoughts on the topic. Common knowledge includes information that most people would know, even if you have to double check the facts in a book. Usually, if you can find the same information in three or more sources, it is probably considered common knowledge. Examples of common knowledge are: George Washington was the first president of the United States; Neil Armstrong was the first person to step on the moon on July 20, 1969; Babies have to learn how to walk and talk; In the United States, people drive on the right side of the road; Most people are right handed, etc. Your own thoughts are just that – what you think about the topic. Your thoughts are usually presented in the introduction and conclusion, as well as in the opening sentences in paragraphs and the transitional statements that tie the paragraphs together.

WHEN IN DOUBT, CITE YOUR SOURCE(S)!!!!!!

Obviously, you know that you must document your source when you **quote** something word for word. You must also document your source when you paraphrase or summarize another person's work. **Paraphrasing** involves restating information (written or spoken) in your own words. You must reword all of the material, not just change a few words. The idea(s) still belong to someone else, so you must give him/her credit, even though you rewrote the information. **Summarizing** is usually much briefer than paraphrasing. When you summarize, you emphasize and rewrite the main point(s) of the source.

With paraphrasing and summarizing, you must clearly identify the works of others to acknowledge their contributions and also so that your own thoughts and contributions are clearly identified.

To review:

You have plagiarized if:

- you took notes that did not distinguish summary and paraphrase from quotation and then you presented wording from the notes as if it were all your own.
- while browsing the Web, you copied text and pasted it into your paper without quotation marks or without citing the source.
- you presented facts without saying where you found them.
- you repeated or paraphrased someone's wording without acknowledgment.
- you took someone's unique or particularly apt phrase without acknowledgment.
- you paraphrased someone's argument or presented someone's line of thought without acknowledgment.
- you bought or otherwise acquired a research paper and handed in part or all of it as your own.

You can avoid plagiarism by:

- making a list of the writers and viewpoints you discovered in your research and using this list to double-check the presentation of material in your paper.
- keeping the following three categories distinct in your notes: your ideas, your summaries of others' material, and exact wording you copy.
- identifying the sources of all material you borrow – exact wording, paraphrases, ideas, arguments, and facts.
- checking with your instructor when you are uncertain about your use of sources. (MLA 60-61)

The following sources were used for the above information and offer more details. Please consult these sources and your instructor if you have questions or concerns about whether you might be plagiarizing.

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 7th ed. New York: Modern Language Association, 2009. {Plagiarism is covered extensively in Chapter 2.}

Troyka, Lynn Quitman, and Douglas Hesse. *Simon & Schuster Handbook for Writers*. 9th ed. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2009. {Plagiarism is covered extensively in Chapter 35.}