

## **Avoiding Plagiarism**

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Subject

Professors

Date

## Introduction

Plagiarism is presenting another person's ideas or words as if they were your own. Most plagiarism that occurs is unintentional plagiarism - for example, inadvertently pasting a quoted passage from a downloaded file directly into a paper and forgetting to include the quotation marks and documentation (Nist 2002). However, there is a difference between an honest mistake and intentional plagiarism - for example, copying sentences from a journal article or submitting a paper that someone else has written. The penalties for unintentional plagiarism may sometimes be severe, but intentional plagiarism is almost always dealt with harshly: students who intentionally plagiarize can receive a failing grade for the paper (or the course) or even be expelled from school.

The availability on the Web of information that can be downloaded and copied has increases the likelihood of accidental plagiarism. In fact, the freewheeling appropriation and circulation of information that routinely takes place on the Web may give the false impression that this material does not need to be documented (Nist 2002). Whether they appear in print or in electronic form, however, the words, ideas, and images of others (including photographs, graphs, charts, and statistics) must be properly documented.

## Avoiding Unintentional Plagiarism

The most common cause of unintentional plagiarism is sloppy research habits. To avoid this problem, start your research paper early. Do not cut and paste text from a Web site or full-text database directly into your paper (Nist 2002). Never use sources that you have not actually read or invent sources that do not exist. If you paraphrase, do so correctly; changing a few words here and there is not enough (Stevens 1991).

In addition to taking careful notes and distinguishing between your ideas and those of your sources, you must also use proper documentation. In general, you must document any words, ideas, and images that you borrow from your sources (whether print or electronic). Of course, certain items need not be documented: common knowledge (information most readers probably know), facts available from a variety of reference sources, familiar sayings and well-known quotations, and your own original research (interviews and surveys, for example). Information that is another writer's original contribution, however, must be acknowledged (Nist 2002). So, although you do not have to document the fact that John F. Kennedy graduated from Harvard in 1940 or that he was elected president in 1960, you do have to document a historian's evaluation of his presidency.

### Revising to Eliminate Plagiarism

You can avoid by using documentation wherever it is required and following these guidelines (Kirzner 2004).

- 1) Enclose borrowed words in quotations marks
- 2) Do not imitate a source's syntax and phrasing
- 3) Document statistics obtained from a source

Any time you download text from the Internet, you risk committing plagiarism. To avoid possibly of plagiarism, follow these guidelines (Kirzner 2004):

- Download information into individual files so that you can keep track of your sources.
- Do not simply cut "copyrighted images" of downloaded text into you paper; summarize or paraphrase this material first.

- Give proper credit whether your information is from online discussion groups, emails, websites, listservs, etc by providing appropriate documentation.

- Enclose them in quotation marks if you do record the exact words of your source.

4) Differentiate your words and ideas from those of our source.

## Conclusion

Basically, plagiarism is when you take someone else's words or ideas and represent them as your own. As academics, your professors value intellectual property (because that is the foundation upon which academe is based) and truly frown upon and level of plagiarism (Stevens 1991). At some colleges, even small instances of plagiarism can get into a world of trouble (they can get you kicked out of school) (Kirzner 2004). You will not be plagiarizing if you provide references for where you got the material (but note that paraphrasing without citing the source is still plagiarism). This doesn't mean that you should not use outside sources to get information; professors expect you to do this. Actually, they love it when you find additional sources, as long as you give credit where credit is due.

Whenever you use sources, you must be careful to document them. In this way, you acknowledge the work of others who influenced your ideas or contributed to your conclusions. Take accurate notes, avoid cutting and pasting chunks of information into your paper, and whenever you quote, summarize, or paraphrase, do so honestly (Nist 2002). Document ideas as well as words, no matter where they come from. "Borrowing" without acknowledgment is plagiarism, and the penalties for plagiarism can be severe.

Reference:

Nist, Sherrie (2002). *College Rules!: How to Study, Survive and Succeed in College*. California:

Ten Speed Press.

Kirzner, Laurie (2004). *The Wadsworth Handbook: With Infotrac*. New York: Thompson

Wadsworth.

Stevens, Clark (1991). *Term Papers Step By Step: Planning, Research, And Writing*. New York:

Walch Publishing.