

The Concept of Plagiarism

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What is Plagiarism?

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, to "plagiarize" means

1. to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own.
2. to use (another's production) without crediting the source.
3. to commit literary theft.
4. to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

In other words, plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward ⁽¹⁾.

In higher education institutions and universities, plagiarism is defined in multiple ways. To name a few: Stanford sees plagiarism as "use, without giving reasonable and appropriate credit to or acknowledging the author or source, of another person's original work, whether such work is made up of code, formulas, ideas, language, research, strategies, writing or other form"⁽²⁾; Yale views plagiarism as "the use of another's work, words, or ideas without attribution" which included "using a source's language without quoting, using information from a source without attribution, and paraphrasing a source in a form that stays too close to the original" ⁽³⁾; Princeton perceives plagiarism as the deliberate use of "someone else's language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source" ⁽⁴⁾; Oxford

characterizes plagiarism as the use of "a writer's ideas or phraseology without giving due credit"⁽⁵⁾; and Brown explains plagiarism to be "appropriating another person's ideas or words (spoken or written) without attributing those word or ideas to their true source" ⁽⁶⁾.

Types of Plagiarism

Anyone who has written or graded a paper knows that plagiarism is not always a black and white issue. The boundary between plagiarism and research is often unclear. Learning to recognize the various forms of plagiarism, especially the more ambiguous ones, is an important step towards effective prevention. Many people think of plagiarism as copying another's work, or borrowing someone else's original ideas. But terms like "copying" and "borrowing" can disguise the seriousness of the offense ⁽⁷⁾:

Sources Not Cited

1. **The Ghost Writer** "The writer turns in another's work, word-for-word, as his or her own".
2. **The Photocopy** "The writer copies significant portions of text straight from a single source, without alteration".
3. **The Potluck Paper** "The writer tries to disguise plagiarism by copying from several different sources, tweaking the sentences to

make them fit together while retaining most of the original phrasing".

4. **The Poor Disguise** "Although the writer has retained the essential content of the source, he or she has altered the paper's appearance slightly by changing key words and phrases".
5. **The Labor of Laziness** "The writer takes the time to paraphrase most of the paper from other sources and make it all fit together, instead of spending the same effort on original work".
6. **The Self-Stealer** "The writer "borrows" generously from his or her previous work, violating policies concerning the expectation of originality adopted by most academic institutions".

Sources Cited (But Still Plagiarized)

1. **The Forgotten Footnote** "The writer mentions an author's name for a source, but neglects to include specific information on the location of the material referenced. This often masks other forms of plagiarism by obscuring source locations".
2. **The Misinformer** "The writer provides inaccurate information regarding the sources, making it impossible to find them".
3. **The Too-Perfect Paraphrase** "The writer properly cites a source, but neglects to put in quotation marks text that has been copied word-for-word, or close to it. Although attributing the basic ideas to the source, the writer is falsely claiming original presentation and interpretation of the information".
4. **The Resourceful Citer** "The writer properly cites all sources, paraphrasing and using quotations appropriately. The catch? The paper contains almost no original work! It is sometimes difficult to spot this form of plagiarism because it looks like any other well-researched document".
5. **The Perfect Crime** "The writer properly quotes and cites sources in some places, but goes on to paraphrase other arguments from those sources without citation. This way, the writer tries to pass off the paraphrased

material as his or her own analysis of the cited material".

Intentional Plagiarism

Just like hacking into websites, plagiarizing papers can be something of a thrill in itself. For many students it becomes a question of ingenuity: "can I sneak a plagiarized paper past my professor?" But there is usually more behind intentional plagiarism than just the thrill of deception.

Self-plagiarism

Self-plagiarism (also known as "recycling fraud"⁽⁸⁾) is the reuse of significant, identical, or nearly identical portions of one's own work without acknowledging that one is doing so or without citing the original work. Articles of this nature are often referred to as duplicate or multiple publications. In addition to the ethical issue, this can be illegal if copyright of the prior work has been transferred to another entity. Typically, self-plagiarism is only considered to be a serious ethical issue in settings where a publication is asserted to consist of new material, such as in academic publishing or educational assignments⁽⁹⁾. It does not apply (except in the legal sense) to public-interest texts, such as social, professional, and cultural opinions usually published in newspapers and magazines.

In academic fields, self-plagiarism occurs when an author reuses portions of his own published and copyrighted work in subsequent publications, but without attributing the previous publication⁽¹⁰⁾. Identifying self-plagiarism is often difficult because limited reuse of material is both legally accepted (as fair use) and ethically accepted⁽¹¹⁾.

It is common for university researchers to rephrase and republish their own work, tailoring it for different academic journals and newspaper articles, to disseminate their work to the widest possible interested public. However, it must be borne in mind that these researchers also obey limits: If half an article is the same as a previous one, it will usually be rejected. One of the

functions of the process of peer review in academic writing is to prevent this type of "recycling".

Why Students Plagiarize

There are many reasons students plagiarize. Sometimes deadlines come around more quickly than expected, sometimes assignments feel overwhelming, and sometimes the boundaries of plagiarism and research just get confused.

Teach your students that the real skills they need to learn are interpretation and analysis -- how to process the information they find. Tell them that anyone with some basic knowledge can find information on the internet -- it's what they do with that information that is important.

Poor Planning

Some students might think, "Why sweat over producing an analysis that has already been done better, by someone who knows more?" Students may also be intimidated by the quality of work found online, thinking their own work cannot compare.

Students are not always the best judges of how much time their assignments will take. They may not be aware of the extent of work involved in a research paper, or may simply be overwhelmed by the task and put it off until the last minute, leaving them with no time for original work of their own.

Scheduling stages of progress on their papers is a very effective way to deal with this. Having them submit bibliographies, outlines, thesis statements, or drafts on specified dates before the final draft is due will give them a good idea of the amount of work involved. It will also help them organize their time and make the task seem less overwhelming.

Plagiarism vs. Paraphrasing

Many students have trouble knowing when they are paraphrasing and when they are plagiarizing. In an effort to make their work seem "more original" by "putting things in their own words," students may often inadvertently plagiarize by

changing the original too much or, sometimes, not enough.

Searching vs. Researching

Today's students learn quickly that finding and manipulating data on the Internet is a valuable skill. With the wealth of information available online, the production of original analysis and interpretation may seem like "busy work" compared to finding the best or most obscure sources⁽¹²⁾.

Plagiarism and the World Wide Web

The World Wide Web has become a more popular source of information for student papers, and many questions have arisen about how to avoid plagiarizing these sources. In most cases, the same rules apply as to a printed source: when a writer must refer to ideas or quote from a WWW site, she must cite that source.

If a writer wants to use visual information from a WWW site, many of the same rules apply. Copying visual information or graphics from a WWW site (or from a printed source) is very similar to quoting information, and the source of the visual information or graphic must be cited. These rules also apply to other uses of textual or visual information from WWW sites.

Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism

1. **Give credit** whenever you use another person's idea, opinion, or theory, any facts, statistics, graphs, drawings—any pieces of information—that are not common knowledge.
2. Put in **quotations** everything that comes directly from the text especially when taking notes like another person's actual spoken or written words.
3. **Paraphrase**, but be sure you are not just rearranging or replacing a few words. Instead, read over what you want to paraphrase carefully; cover up the text with your hand, or close the text so you can't see any of it (and

so aren't tempted to use the text as a "guide"). Write out the idea in your own words without peeking.

4. **Check your paraphrase** against the original text to be sure you have not accidentally used the same phrases or words, and that the information is accurate.
5. **Tell your students that what interests you most is:**
 - a) Seeing how they understand the assigned topic.
 - b) How they develop their own style and voice.
 - c) Explain to them that you know writing is a learning process.
 - d) You do not expect them to be as brilliant as experts who have devoted years to the subject.
 - e) Their experiences and the context of your class give them a unique perspective that may give them a far more interesting angle on the issues than those of the "experts."
 - f) Explain that your students must retain the essential ideas of the original, but significantly change the style and grammatical structure to fit in the context of their argument.

Legal aspects

Though plagiarism in some contexts is considered theft or stealing, it does not exist in a legal sense. "Plagiarism" is not mentioned in any current statute, either criminal or civil⁽¹³⁾. Some cases may be treated as unfair competition or a violation of the doctrine of moral rights⁽¹³⁾. The increased availability of intellectual property due to a rise in technology has furthered the debate as to whether copyright offences are criminal. Plagiarism is not the same as copyright infringement. While both terms may apply to a particular act, they are different concepts. Copyright infringement is a violation of the rights of a copyright holder, when material restricted by copyright is used without consent. On the other hand, the moral concept of plagiarism is

concerned with the unearned increment to the plagiarizing author's reputation that is achieved through false claims of authorship. Plagiarism is not illegal towards the author, but towards the reader, patron or teacher. Even when copyright has expired, false claims of authorship may still constitute plagiarism.

For professors and researchers, plagiarism is punished by sanctions ranging from suspension to termination, along with the loss of credibility and perceived integrity^(14,15). Charges of plagiarism against students and professors are typically heard by internal disciplinary committees, which students and professors have agreed to be bound by⁽¹⁶⁾.

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