

What is Plagiarism?

What is Plagiarism and Why is it Important?

In college courses, we are continually engaged with other people's ideas: we read them in texts, hear them in lecture, discuss them in class, and incorporate them into our own writing. As a result, it is very important that we give credit where it is due. Plagiarism is using others' ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information. In *Helping Students Avoid Plagiarism* by Stephen Wilhoit, the author lists the following types of plagiarism:

- Buying a paper from a research service or term paper mill.
- Turning in another student's work without that student's knowledge.
- Turning in a paper a peer has written for the student.
- Copying a paper from a source text without proper acknowledgement.
- Copying materials from a source text, supplying proper documentation, but leaving out quotation marks.
- Paraphrasing materials from a source text without appropriate documentation.

The internet has made simple an additional type of plagiarism:

- Turning in a paper from a *free term paper* website.

Plagiarism: How to Recognize and Avoid it

To avoid plagiarism, you must give credit whenever you use

- another person's idea, opinion, or theory;
- any facts, statistics, graphs, drawings—any piece of information—that are not common knowledge;
- quotations of another person's actual spoken or written words; or paraphrase of another person's spoken or written words.

How to Recognize Unacceptable and Acceptable Paraphrases

Here's the original text, from page 1 of *Lizzie Borden: A Case Book of Family and Crime* in 1890s by Joyce Williams et al.:

The rise of industry, the growth of cities, and the expansion of the population were the three great developments of late nineteenth century American history. As new, larger, steam-powered factories became a feature of the American landscape in the East, they transformed farm hands into industrial laborers, and provided jobs for a rising tide of immigrants. With industry came urbanization the growth of large cities (like Fall River, Massachusetts, where the Bordens lived) which became the centers of production as well as of commerce and trade.

Here's an UNACCEPTABLE paraphrase that is plagiarism:

The increase of industry, the growth of cities, and the explosion of the population were three large factors of nineteenth century America. As steam-driven companies became more visible in the eastern part of the country, they changed farm hands into factory workers and provided jobs

for the large wave of immigrants. With industry came the growth of large cities like Fall River where the Bordens lived which turned into centers of commerce and trade as well as production.

What makes this passage plagiarism? The preceding passage is considered plagiarism for two reasons:

- the writer has only changed around a few words and phrases, or changed the order of the original's sentences.
- the writer has failed to cite a source for any of the ideas or facts.

If you do either or both of these things, you are plagiarizing.

NOTE: This paragraph is also problematic because it changes the sense of several sentences (for example, "steam-driven companies" in sentence two misses the original's emphasis on factories).

Here's an ACCEPTABLE paraphrase:

Fall River, where the Borden family lived, was typical of north-eastern industrial cities of the nineteenth century. Steam-powered production had shifted labor from agriculture to manufacturing, and as immigrants arrived in the US, they found work in these new factories. As a result, populations grew, and large urban areas arose. Fall River was one of these manufacturing and commercial centers (Williams 1).

Why is this passage acceptable? This is acceptable paraphrasing because the writer:

- accurately relays the information in the original .
- uses her own words.
- lets her reader know the source of her information.

Here's an example of quotation and paraphrase used together, which is also ACCEPTABLE:

Fall River, where the Borden family lived, was typical of north-eastern industrial cities of the nineteenth century. As steam-powered production shifted labor from agriculture to manufacturing, the demand for workers "changed farm hands into factory workers," and created jobs for immigrants. In turn, growing populations increased the size of urban areas. Fall River was one of these manufacturing hubs that were also "centers of commerce and trade" (Williams 1).

Why is this passage acceptable? This is acceptable paraphrasing because the writer:

- records the information in the original passage accurately.
- gives credit for the ideas in this passage.
- indicates which part is taken directly from her source by putting the passage in quotation marks and citing the page number.

Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism

1. Put in quotations everything that comes directly from the text especially when taking notes.

2. 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 you aren't tempted to use the text as a "guide"). Write out the idea in your own words without peeking.
3. Check your paraphrase against the original text to be sure you have not accidentally used the same phrases or words, and that information is accurate.

Terms You Need to Know (or What is Common Knowledge?)

Common knowledge: facts that can be found in numerous places and are likely to be known by a lot of people.

Example: **John F. Kennedy was elected President of the United States in 1960.**

This is generally known information. You do not need to document this fact.

However, you must document facts that are not generally known and ideas that interpret facts.

Example: According to the American Family Leave Coalition's new book, *Family Issues and Congress*, President Bush's relationship with Congress has hindered family leave legislation (6).

The idea that "Bush's relationship with Congress has hindered family leave legislation" is not a fact but an interpretation; consequently, you need to cite your source.

Quotations

Quotation: using someone's words. When you quote, place the passage you are using in quotation marks, and document the source according to a standard documentation style.

The following example uses the American Psychological Associations style:

Example: According to Peter S. Pritchard in *USA Today*, "Public schools need reform but they're irreplaceable in teaching all the nation's young" (1998).

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing: using someone's ideas, but putting them in your own words. This is probably the skill you will use most when incorporating sources into your writing. Although you use your own words to paraphrase, you must still acknowledge the source of the information.

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Online. Internet. 29 November, 1999. Available <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts.plagiarism.html>