

## TYPES OF PLAGIARISM

Sometimes plagiarism is simple dishonesty. If you buy, borrow, or steal an essay to turn in as your own work, you are plagiarizing. If you copy word-for-word or change a word here and there while copying without enclosing the copied passage in quotation marks and identifying the author, you are also plagiarizing.

But plagiarism can be more complicated in act and intent.

Paraphrasing, stating someone else's ideas in your own words, can lead you to unintentional plagiarism. Jotting down notes and ideas from sources and then using them without proper attributions to the authors or titles in introductory phrases may result in a paper that is only a blend of your words combined with the words of others that appear to be yours.

Another way to plagiarize is to allow other students or friends to give you too much rhetorical help or do too much editing and proofreading of your work. If you think you have received substantial help in any way from people whose names will not appear as authors of the paper, you should acknowledge that help in a short sentence at the end of the paper or in your list of Works Cited. If you are not sure how much help is too much, talk with your instructor, so the two of you can decide what kind of outside help (and how much) is acceptable, and how to give credit where credit is due.

As you go through the writing process, you should keep careful track of when you use ideas and/or exact words from sources. As a conscientious writer, you have to make an honest effort to distinguish between your own ideas, those of others, and what might be considered common knowledge. Try to identify which part of your work comes from an identifiable source and then document the use of that source using the proper format, such as a parenthetical citation and a Works Cited list. If you are unsure about what needs documenting, talk with your instructor.

When thinking about plagiarism, it is hard to avoid talking about ideas as if they were objects like tables and chairs. Obviously, that's not the case. You should not feel that you are under pressure to invent completely new ideas. Instead, original writing consists of thinking through ideas and expressing them in your own way. The result may not be entirely new, but, if honestly done, it may be interesting and worthwhile reading. Print or electronic sources, as well as other people, may add useful ideas to your own thoughts. When they do so in identifiable and specific ways, give them the credit they deserve.

The following examples should clarify the difference between dishonest and proper uses of sources.

### The Source

The US has only lost approximately 30 percent of its original forest area, most of this in the nineteenth century. The loss has not been higher mainly because population pressure has never been as great there as in Europe. The doubling of US farmland from 1880 to 1920 happened almost without affecting the total forest area as most was converted from grasslands.

From Bjorn Lomborg, *The Skeptical Environmentalist*

## Word-for-Word Plagiarizing

In the following example, the writer tacks on a new opening part of the first sentence in the hope that the reader won't notice that the rest of the paragraph is simply copied from the source. The plagiarized words are italicized. Despite the outcry from environmentalist groups like Earth First! and the Sierra Club, it is important to note that *the US has only lost approximately 30 percent of its original forest area, most of this in the nineteenth century. The loss has not been higher mainly because population pressure has never been as great here as in Europe. The doubling of US farmland from 1880 to 1920 happened almost without affecting the total forest area as most was converted from grasslands.*

Quotation marks around all the copied text, followed by a parenthetical citation, would avoid plagiarism in this case. But even if that were done, a reader might wonder why so much was quoted from Lomborg in the first place. Beyond that, a reader might wonder why you chose to use a quote here instead of paraphrase this passage, which as a whole is not very quotable, especially with the odd reference to Europe. Using exact quotes should be reserved for situations where the original author has stated the idea in a better way than any paraphrase you might come up with. In the above case, the information could be summed up and simply paraphrased, with a proper citation, because the idea, even in your words, belongs to someone else. Furthermore, a paper consisting largely of quoted passages and little original writing would be relatively worthless.

## Plagiarizing by Paraphrase

In the following case, the exact ideas in the source are followed very closely—too closely—simply by substituting your own words and sentences for those of the original.

### ORIGINAL

The US has only lost approximately 30 percent of its forest area, most of this in the nineteenth century.

The loss has not been higher mainly because population pressure has never been as great there as in Europe.

The doubling of US farmland from 1880 to 1920 happened almost without affecting the total forest area as most was converted from grasslands.

### PARAPHRASE

Only 30 percent of the original forest area has been lost.

Europe has fared slightly worse due to greater population pressure.

Even though US farmland doubled from 1880 to 1920, little forest area was affected since the farms appeared on grasslands.

The ideas in the right column appear to be original. Obviously, they are just Lomborg's ideas presented in different words without any acknowledgement. Plagiarism can be avoided easily here by introducing the paraphrased section with an attribution to Lomborg and then following up with a parenthetical citation. Such an introduction is underlined here:

Bjorn Lomborg points out that despite environmentalists' outcries. . . . (page number).

Properly used, paraphrase is a valuable rhetorical technique. You should use it to simplify or summarize so that others' ideas or information, properly attributed in the introduction and documented in a parenthetical citation, may be woven into the pattern of your own ideas. You should not use

paraphrase simply to avoid quotation; you should use it to express another's important ideas in your own words when those ideas are not expressed in a way that is useful to quote directly.

### Mosaic Plagiarism

This is a more sophisticated kind of plagiarism wherein phrases and terms are lifted from the source and sprinkled in among your own prose. Words and phrases lifted verbatim or with only slight changes are italicized: Environmentalist groups have long bemoaned the loss of US forests, particularly in this age of population growth and urbanization. Yet, *the US has only lost approximately 30 percent of its original forest area, and most of this in the nineteenth century* . There are a few main reasons for this. First, *population pressure has never been as great in this country as in Europe* . Second, the explosion of US farmland, *when it doubled from 1880 to 1920, happened almost without affecting the total forest area as most was converted from grasslands* .

Mosaic plagiarism may be caused by sloppy notetaking, but it always looks thoroughly dishonest and intentional and will be judged as such. In the above example, just adding an introduction and a parenthetical citation will not solve the plagiarism problem since no quotation marks are used where required. But adding them would raise the question of why those short phrases and basic statements of fact and opinion are worth quoting word for word. The best solution is to paraphrase everything: rewrite the plagiarized parts in your own words, introduce the passage properly, and add a parenthetical citation.

### Summary

Using quotation marks around someone else's words avoids the charge of plagiarism, but when overdone, makes for a patchwork paper with little flow to it. When most of what you want to say comes from a single source, either quote directly or paraphrase. In both cases, introduce your borrowed words or ideas by attributing them to the author and then follow them with a parenthetical citation.

The secret of using sources productively is to make them work for you to support and amplify your ideas. If you find, as you work at paraphrasing, quoting, and citing, that you are only pasting sources together with a few of your own words and ideas thrown in-that too much of your paper comes from your sources and not enough from your own mind-then go back and start over. Try rewriting the paper without looking at your sources, just using your own ideas; after you have completed a draft entirely of your own, add the specific words and ideas from your sources to support what you want to say.

If you have any doubts about the way you are using sources, talk to your instructor as soon as you can.