

Avoiding Plagiarism



“Plagiarism is taking the writings, ideas, or thoughts of others and passing them off as one’s original work. Plagiarism is not restricted to published material; if you submit an old paper written by your roommate, if you buy a paper from a ‘service,’ or even if you base a paper on a lecture you heard in a course without acknowledging that lecture, you are guilty of plagiarism.

Plagiarism is not restricted to long quotations; if you quote a sentence or even a memorable phrase without acknowledging it, you are plagiarizing. You can plagiarize without even using the exact words of the original author; if you paraphrase a passage without crediting it, you are plagiarizing.” ~ Celia Millward and Jane Flick, Handbook for Writers.

How do I avoid plagiarism?

- 1. Make sure you understand the material.** As the University of Washington Psychology Writing Center points out, “If you can’t put the information into your own words, you aren’t ready to write about it.” If you can construct the bones of the argument in your own words and just bring in sources for support, you will not only avoid plagiarism but write a better paper.
- 2. Know when and how to use direct quotations, paraphrases, summaries, and common knowledge.** Direct quotations are used to quote something directly and are enclosed with quotation marks. Paraphrases and summaries must be entirely in your own words and word order, using the original source as a base; these do not need to be enclosed in quotation marks, but must be documented. Common knowledge, information that is generally known and can be found in several general reference sources, does not need to be documented.
- 3. Use a signal in the body of your text to show where the use of a source starts.** Words that signal the use of a source include the author *comments, describes, contends, claims, points out, observes, suggests, maintains, concedes, grants, complains, deplores, illustrates, says, etc.*
- 4. Use a signal to show where your use of the source ends.** This in-text citation, usually found in parentheses or shown by a footnote or endnote number, allows readers to switch focus from your supporting material back to the main thrust of your paper. As a general rule of thumb, when in doubt, always cite. Don’t gamble with the rules; follow them.
- 5. Include a complete list of the sources you used at the end of your paper so that readers can find out more about them.** The name and form of this list will differ by documentation style. Check a style handbook, or the Writing Center’s handouts, for more information about the different styles of documentation.