

*Oranim Department of English Language and Literature
Annual Expository Writing Workshop*

Description of Plagiarism and its Penalties

What is Plagiarism?¹

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:

According to the *Merriam-Webster On-Line 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.

But can words and ideas really be stolen?

According to U.S. law, the answer is yes. In the United States and many other countries, the expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property, and is protected by copyright laws, just like original inventions. Almost all forms of expression fall under copyright protection as long as they are recorded in some media (such as a book or a computer file).

All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not (see our section on "fair use" rules)

Attention! **Changing the words of an original source is *not* sufficient to prevent plagiarism.** If you have retained the essential idea of an original source, and have not cited it, then no matter how drastically you may have altered its context or presentation, *you have still plagiarized.*

¹ This entire page was taken from [/www.plagiarism.org/learning_center/what_is_plagiarism.html](http://www.plagiarism.org/learning_center/what_is_plagiarism.html).

As students and scholars of English language and literature, we are always reading the ideas and words of others. Indeed, with every Internet search we initiate and every essay we read, we enter into a community of individuals who have given generously of their time, talents and energy in investigating literary issues and sharing their insights with us. In our own paper-writing process, the crucial issue is how to stay alert to the contribution of these other literary critics and thinkers to our own ideas and papers, and how to give credit where credit is due. Part of the difficulty in avoiding the unwitting appropriation of ideas and/or words that are not your own is that the novice researcher is sometimes unaware of what qualifies as plagiarism.

Examples of Plagiarism and How to Remedy the Offence:²

1. **Use of any idea or observation** – whole or in part—from another book or person without giving credit for it to that book or person, either in the bibliography or in a footnote. If a specific idea or observation is borrowed, mere general mention in the bibliography without pinpointing the idea or place **is not sufficient**, and a parenthetical reference must be used.

Example: In your research on the poet Emily Dickinson, you read the following observation regarding Dickinson's poems in an essay by the literary critic Wendy Martin –

Some of Dickinson's most powerful poems express her firmly held conviction that life cannot be fully comprehended without an understanding of death.

In your own paper you write: "Dickinson believed that we cannot fully comprehend life unless we also understand death." This is an example of plagiarism! In order to avoid plagiarizing and to acknowledge the source of your assertion, you need only **frame** your remark in the following fashion:

As Wendy Martin has suggested, Emily Dickinson firmly believed that one cannot fully understand the nature of life unless one also understands the nature of death (625).

OR:

As has been argued, Dickinson's poems express the idea that life "...cannot be fully comprehended without an understanding of death" (Martin 625).

² I have borrowed generously from the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Sixth Edition, in compiling this entire section. All of the examples are taken from the *MLA Handbook*, 71-72.

2. **If the exact words of another source** — a book or person — are used, without **both** a parenthetical reference and quotation marks around those words, this is an example of plagiarism. Simply giving a citation in the bibliography, or even only a footnote, is not sufficient. Changing a word or a few words in a sentence or paragraph, or rearranging the order of the words in a sentence or paragraph, does not alter the fact that both idea and words have been taken from another source in a significant manner. If plagiarism is to be avoided, all the words borrowed from the source must be put in quotation marks and a parenthetical reference in the body of the paper must be used.

3. **Utilizing another's "apt" or original phrase:**

Example: In your research on language and culture, you read the following in an essay by Michael Agar:

Everyone uses the word language and everybody these days talks about culture... "Languaculture" is a reminder, I hope, of the necessary connection between its two parts.

In your own paper you write: "At the intersection between language and culture lies a concept that we might call 'languaculture.'" This is an example of plagiarism! You can avoid plagiarism if you write the following:

At the intersection of language and culture lies a concept that Michael Agar has called "languaculture" (60).

4. Plagiarism does not consist simply of the use of the words or ideas in a published book or article. Similar use of another student's paper—in whole or part—must be footnoted and, if appropriate, quoted as outlined in #2 above.

5. Similarly, oral help from another person should be given similar credit either in a footnote or in the bibliography, as the case warrants. The failure to document another person's supplying or augmenting an idea or words is also a form of plagiarism.

Types of Plagiarism³

Anyone who has written or graded a paper knows that plagiarism is not always a black-and-white issue. Learning to recognize the various forms of plagiarism, especially the more ambiguous ones, is an important step in the fight to prevent it.

I. 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

4) **“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.

5) **“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.

II. 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.

³ "Types of Plagiarism" section taken in full from http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_types_of_plagiarism.html 8 December 2011.

⁴ This type of plagiarism is also known as "patchwriting" – "copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym substitutes" (Howard 1995: 213).

4) “The Resourceful Citer”

The writer properly cites all sources, paraphrasing and using quotations appropriately. The catch? The paper contains almost no original work! Though such a paper looks well researched, it presents a form of plagiarism because it fails to show individual thinking, which is the purpose of academic writing.

Penalties for Plagiarism:

The policy of the Department of English Language and Literature is to treat any act of plagiarism with severity. A student’s ignorance of plagiarism, either in general or in any of its particular aspects, is no excuse or defense. Neither are a student’s benign intentions an acceptable excuse.

The minimal penalty for plagiarism is failure on the paper which contains the plagiarism—with no chance to rewrite it. The maximum penalty for a single instance of plagiarism is failure in the course. A repetition of plagiarism at any time during the student’s studies in the Department may be grounds for permanent dismissal from the Department. In all cases, the teacher will report to the Oranim Disciplinary Committee and the facts of the case will be documented in the student’s file.

Summing Up:

According to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (75), you have plagiarized if

- you took notes that did not distinguish summary and paraphrase from quotation and then presented wording from the notes as if it were all your own.
- while browsing the Web, you copied text and pasted it into your paper without quotation marks or citing the source.
- you presented facts without saying where you found them.
- you repeated or paraphrased someone's wording without acknowledgement.
- you took someone's unique or particularly apt phrase without acknowledgement.
- you paraphrased someone's argument or presented someone's line of thought without acknowledgement.
- you bought or otherwise acquired a research paper and handed in part or all of it as your own.

You can avoid plagiarism by

- making a list of the writers and viewpoints you discovered in your research and using this list to double-check the presentation in your paper.
- keeping the following three categories distinct in your notes: your ideas, your summaries of others' material, and exact wording you copy.
- identifying the sources of all material you borrow – exact wording, paraphrases, ideas, arguments and facts.
- checking with your instructor when you are uncertain about your use of sources.
- mastering the principles and technicalities of correct referencing of sources – in the body of your paper, in footnotes and in your paper's bibliography.

Sources:

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Sixth Edition. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003.

Haifa University handout "Description of Plagiarism and its Penalties" 2009. Supplied by Nancy Peled.

Howard, Rebecca Moore. "Plagiarisms, Authorships, and the Academic Death Penalty." *College English* 57 (1995): 788-806.

"plagiarism.org" website. Web. 8 Dec. 2011 <http://www.plagiarism.org/index.html>