

Plagiarism, Attribution, & Using Sources

Plagiarism is

Taking someone else's *words* as your own without attributing (citing) them at all.

Taking someone else's as your own without *properly* attributing (citing) them.

Using someone else's *idea* as your own.

There is also *self-plagiarism*. That is

Turning in a paper written for another class or school.

In the professional world/field that could be copyright infringement

Plagiarism can be intentional:

Sometimes it is done out of fear.

In this copy/paste world, a student might think that it does not matter.

A student might think they will not get caught.

Plagiarism can also be unintentional:

A student does not know how to properly cite in APA.

A student might not know how to integrate sources into their writing.

Instructors might assume that the student knows the specifics of what plagiarism is.

Things that require attribution

- Any concepts you learned from a source, regardless if you used their wording or put it in your own words, such as *Research shows that certain magazines geared for younger females are correlated with concerns about body image* (Thomsen, 2002).
- Any information that is *not* common knowledge, such as *Approximately 18% of patients diagnosed with body dysmorphic disorders are men* (Anderson & Smith, 1997).
- Interviews (in-text only).
- Any visuals, such as graphs, maps, and photos created by someone else.
- Any data or statistics

Things that do not require attribution

Common knowledge is exempt from attribution. Common knowledge is something that can come from many sources and the reader can be expected to know or easily look up. As long as it is in your own words and sentence structure, you do not need to attribute common knowledge information.

- There are fifty states in the U.S.
- The capital of Minnesota is St. Paul

- Korea is divided at the 38th parallel.
- In the U.S., drivers drive on the right.

General reference information does not need to be attributed.

- *The heart pumps blood through the body* does not need to be cited.
- *Seat belts save lives* does not need to be cited.
- *Five thousand people a year die from not wearing seat belts* does.

Common sense does not need to be attributed

- Smokers are at a high risk of lung disease
- Look both ways before crossing
- Brush your teeth to prevent cavities

Historical dates and events do not need to be cited.

Your own thoughts and opinions do not need to be cited.

The Gray Area

There is a gray area when it comes to citing material. For example, In the U.S., drivers drive on the right does not need to be cited; however, why do drivers in the U.S. drive on the right? If one were to write that drivers in the U.S. drive on the right because once the country gained independence, colonial ego declared that if they are riding on a road and run into King George, King George will have to get out of the way. That is something that should be cited. A reader will want to know where that information originated.

If you are not absolutely certain, cite it. It is easier to cite something that can be removed than finding the passage again. "Richard Nixon is the only president in U.S. history to resign from office" (Smith, 2010, p. 57).

Fair Use

- There is a "fair use" exemption.
- The nature of the *Fair Use Act* revolves around the idea that use of the material will not diminish its value.
- Educational, non-profit, and personal use is more likely to be considered *fair use*.
- Unpublished material is still protected.
- What impact would this have on the market value? It is considered unfair if it affects sales of the original.
- If the quote is germane and properly attributed.
- How much are you using? If you use one sentence, it will more likely be considered fair use.
- If you use one source and use it over and over and over, it might not be "fair use."
- There is no *legal definition* of a "small portion." It is generally accepted that you can use 50 words from an article and 300 words from a book. Not always. Someone at *The Nation* used 300 words of Gerald Ford's 200,000 word memoir for a news related item and it was ruled not fair by the Supreme Court. It was why he pardoned Nixon, which many people consider germane.

Incorporating Sources into Writing

There are three ways to incorporate information from your sources into your papers to help avoid plagiarism.

- *Quote* – Reproduce exactly the author’s words and attribute them.
- *Paraphrase* – When you try to recreate the meaning, not the words.
- *Summary* – A run down.

In all three methods, the source will need to be attributed.

Quotes and tips on using them

- Use a quote if the language is particularly original, eloquent, or memorable.
- Use a quote when the precise wording is required for accuracy.
- Use a quote if it will be significantly shorter than your paraphrase.
- Include page numbers in in-text citations
- If a quote is under 40 words, put them in quotes in the body text. If it is more than 40 words (or four or more lines), it should be in its own block of copy.
- Any additional words the author did not use need to be in brackets. For example, “He [Gore] stated that a three degree rise in temperature would be catastrophic” (Smith, 2010, p. 234).
- Any missing words should use an ellipsis. For example, “As the planet warms and the waters darken . . . resulting in a rise in sea temperature” (Smith, 2010, p. 234).
- Quotes should support your argument, never state it.
- Should include a signal phrase, such as According to Smith (2014)
- Build up to and establish the quote rather than starting the sentence with it.
- Quotes should be less than 20% of the paper.
- Using too many quotes can count as plagiarism.

Paraphrases and tips on when to paraphrase

- Paraphrases should be used if the details are important, but it is not so uniquely or elegantly expressed.
- Paraphrases should be roughly the same length and amount of detail as the original source, in the student’s own words.
- Make sure to look up any unfamiliar terms.
- Write for someone who did not read the original material.
- Try writing it without looking at the original work.
- Make sure to check yours against the original.
- Not only the words, but the sentence structure and style must be different. The term for the is the music.
- Write with a thesaurus open on your screen. www.dictionary.com
- At the very most, three words in a row can be the same.

Summaries

- Summaries should be used if the main ideas are important but not the details.
- Indicate the author’s thesis in your opening sentence.
- Explain the main points in the same order the author does.
- Connect the ideas so your reader will understand how they are related.
- Avoid integrating your own opinions.

Ways to avoid plagiarism:

- Outlining and writing the outline in APA format.

- Use more than one or two sources.
- Don't put a piece of information into your paper without knowing where it came from.
- Keep accurate records when you are writing and taking notes. Use folders and break the sources up into categories based on your outline.
- When you are taking notes make sure to put quotes in quotes. Changing a few words will not do it. They all need to be changed and attributed.
- Cite the sources of all information that is not common knowledge.
- Print out and save all documents you use.
- Say the inverse.
- If nearly 75% of mechanical engineering majors are male, write it as only 25% are female.
- If greenhouse gases keep the planet 58 degrees warmer, say without them the planet would be 58 degrees cooler.
- Round up or down. If they say 19%, you can say nearly 20% or one in five. If they say 21%, you can say more than 20%.
- If 5,000 people a year die from not wearing seat belts, say 5,000 lives a year would be saved by wearing them.
- Print out and highlight the piece of info. Let a day or two pass. When you are proofreading your last draft, double check to see if your paraphrase is too close.
- Visit the Writing Center. There are experts in the field eager to help.

Sample:

"Cigarette smoking is responsible for more than 480,000 deaths per year in the United States, including an estimated 41,000 deaths resulting from secondhand smoke exposure. This is about one in five deaths annually, or 1,300 deaths every day" (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2014, para. 4).

Paraphrase:

More than 480,000 deaths are caused by cigarette smoking in the U.S. alone. That figure includes an approximated 41,000 deaths caused by exposure to secondhand smoke. That accounts for nearly 20% of all deaths; more than 1,300 daily (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2014, para. 4).

Considerations:

- Note that the original passage specifies *cigarettes*. It does not say *tobacco*, so switching the words might change the meaning and the figures.
- The number 480,000 is not a good number to round. It is 20,000 short of being half a million, so it should stay as is.
- *The U.S.* is also a specific term. *America* would not be an apt substitute for U.S. because of the reach of North, Central, and South America. The figure in that case would be much higher than the 480,000 in the U.S.