

Papers: Source Citation and Plagiarism

Definition of Plagiarism¹

A person plagiarizes when using the distinctive ideas or words of another person without adequate acknowledgement. To use the ideas or words of another person as though they are your own is as dishonest in academic matters as forgery, embezzlement, or robbery in financial matters. In order to avoid plagiarism when borrowing what belongs to another person, writers must indicate the source by citation, and they must enclose any and all the distinctive words of the source within quotation marks. Failure to acknowledge the use of someone else's material is a serious offense, and the penalty is severe.

General Requirements for Acknowledgement of Sources

1. Quotations

Any quotations, however brief, must be placed in quotation marks. A quotation must be accompanied by a citation which precisely indicates the original source.

2. Paraphrasing

Any material which is paraphrased or summarized must also be specifically acknowledged in a citation. A thorough rewording or rearrangement of an author's text does not relieve one of this responsibility. Occasionally a student claims that he has read a source long before he wrote his paper and has unwittingly duplicated some of its phrases or ideas. This is not a valid excuse. The student is responsible for taking adequate notes so that debts of paraphrasing may be acknowledged where they are due.

¹ Acknowledgement is gratefully made to the University of Virginia for material taken from its pamphlet [An Explanation of Plagiarism](#).

3. Citation formats

The key principle in citing sources is to give readers all the information they need to find a source themselves if they want to check your information or research the topic further. The format for citing sources varies widely from discipline to discipline and class to class, but there are commonly accepted guidelines for citation format.

4. Bibliography

Sources which have been consulted in the preparation of an essay or report may be listed in a bibliography. The mere listing of a source in a bibliography, however, must not be considered a proper acknowledgement for specific use of that source within the essay or report.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center, located in the Armory, offers excellent help with any stage of a writing project from outline to final draft, for all writers at any level. Students are encouraged to visit the Writing Center whenever they need assistance, both to become better writers and better students.

Examples of Plagiarism

In November 1967 the *Journal of Mississippi History*² published an article, large parts of which had been plagiarized from a Master's thesis written at Emory University. The one time the author of the article cited the thesis in a footnote, he stated that he had "relied heavily" on the thesis. The footnote did not adequately indicate how extensively he had taken material from the thesis.

² "The American Historical Association and the AAUP: A Joint Inquiry into an Issue of Attribution," *American Historical Association Newsletter* 10 (January, 1973), 1-13.

Sentence as in article

General Wilkinson occupied the town and fort and began to strengthen the fortifications and to organize a garrison for the protection of the town and the Gulf Coast. He seems to have been expected to cooperate with and to aid the federal Indian agents in administering federal Indian policy. He was also responsible for punishing the Indians and whites who defied the laws. As superintendent of Indian Affairs, he faced three fundamental problems which concerned the acquisition of Indian lands, the sale of liquor to Indians, and the white squatters on Indian lands.

Sentence as in thesis

Wilkinson occupied the town and fort and immediately began to strengthen the fortifications to organize a garrison for the protection of the town as well as that area of the Gulf Coast. Not only was he to cooperate with and to aid the federal agents in adapting and administering the federal Indian policy in the Territory, but he was also responsible for punishing those Indians and whites who defied laws of Indian policy. As superintendent of Indian Affairs within the territory, Holmes faced three important problems: the acquisition of Indian lands, the sale of liquor to the Indians, and the squatters on Indian lands.

The Internet

Increasingly, faculty report cases of plagiarism from sources on the Internet. The same standards for citations apply to the Internet as to written sources — articles, books, magazines, etc. Remember that tracing Internet citations is easily done. Avoid the temptation of using Internet materials inappropriately.

Friendly Assistance with Plagiarism

Finally, plagiarism can come in more complicated forms than simply not citing a published source. There is nothing wrong with asking a friend to read over a draft of a paper for you. But how far can a friend's corrections go before he is writing the paper? Using a friend's words, ideas, and organization is as serious a form of plagiarism as using a published source without citation.

Where does the line between good help and too much help fall? There is not a clear line, but there are some guidelines. Proofreading for spelling and punctuation is not a problem. It should also be a last step. But if you let a friend do that sort of work for you, are you really learning how to do it yourself? What if your friend isn't around for the next paper? A friend suggesting to you that a sentence is unclear is OK, suggesting better wording to you is probably not. Someone to bounce organizational ideas off is OK; Organizing your paper for you is not.

The general principle here is that writing is a learning process. If you let someone else do your work, you aren't going to learn. This is another reason for visiting the Writing Center for this kind of assistance rather than getting it from friends. The Writing Center staff is trained to help you learn and improve as a writer, not just to complete an acceptable one-time effort for a particular assignment.

Exams, Homework, and Labs

Exams and Homework

Professors will have different ground rules for different assignments. It is the responsibility of the student to understand and follow these rules. In all cases, the following practices are academically dishonest and subject to punishment.

1. Copying from another student's work, either during an exam or on a take-home assignment.
2. Copying from unauthorized written materials such as crib sheets during an exam.
3. Providing unauthorized or improper assistance to another student, or receiving such assistance, including unauthorized collaboration on take-home assignment. There are times when professors will assign group projects. It is the responsibility of the student to understand when working with other students is authorized, as in group assignments, and when it is not. Furthermore, the lines between proper and improper assistance may at times seem unclear. Refer again to the section "Friendly Assistance and Plagiarism" for a complete discussion of this issue.

If the ground rules of a class are not clear, ask the professor!

Laboratory Work

Absolute integrity in the reporting of experimental work is a vital element in the practice of science. The community of scientists treats with great concern incidents where the reliability of scientific reporting is challenged. In preparing laboratory reports, students need to avoid not only plagiarizing other reports, but the following practices as well:

1. Doctoring observations (qualitative or quantitative) to make the report results of an experiment conform to the "expected" results
2. In cases of multiple measurements, discarding some trials in order to make the results look better (smaller estimated error or a best value closer to the true value). Elimination of a suspect value is justified in the following cases:
 - A) An obvious blunder was made during the experiment. (An example is the overshooting the end point in a titration.)
 - B) There is theoretical justification (based on statistical considerations)

for throwing out a measurement. (An example is the Q-test used in many of our physics and chemistry courses.)

Enforcement Procedures

Faculty report all cases of academic dishonesty to the Dean of Students. Penalties for cases of academic dishonesty are listed below.

First Offense

The penalty for a first offense is decided by the professor involved in the consultation with the Dean of Students.

Second Offense

The penalty for a second offense is expulsion from the College. Student appeals of determinations of academic dishonesty may be made to the President of the College.

Avoiding Offenses

The best way to avoid academic dishonesty is by conscientious attention to one's own academic responsibilities. Careful reading, note taking, and thinking will guide the student away from plagiarism. Steady work over the course of a semester and well-planned preparation for exams, homework, and laboratories will remove the temptation to cheat. Academic dishonesty indicates that the student has cheated himself already.

If a student is in doubt about the ground rules for an assignment or about the particular use of sources in a paper, he should consult with his professor to clear up any possible ambiguities or problems.