**PLAGIARISM**

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**What is Plagiarism?**

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 OnLine 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 the question arises here is can we really steal words and ideas?

According to Indian parent law, the answer is **YES**. In India 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:

• Submitting 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 matterhow drastically you may have altered its context or presentation, *you have still plagiarized.* Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism.

**Types of Plagiarism:**

Anyone who has written or graded a paper knows that plagiarism is not always a black-and white issue. The boundary between plagiarism and research is often unclear. 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 submits another’s work, word-for-word, as his or her own (as mostly done by the students while submitting the assignments).

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) **“The Poor Disguise”** Although the writer has retained the essential content of the source, he or she has altered the paper’s appearance slightly by changing key words and phrases.

5) **“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.

6) **“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. The citations provided by the writer are not correct or are mismatched.

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.

4) **“The Resourceful Citer”** The writer properly cites all sources, paraphrasing and using quotations appropriately. However, the paper contains almost no original work! It is sometimes difficult to spot this form of plagiarism because it looks like any other well-researched document.

5) **“The Perfect Crime”** Well, we all know it doesn’t exist. In this case, the writer properly quotes and cites sources in some places, but goes on to paraphrase other arguments from those sources without citation. This way, the writer tries to pass off the paraphrased material as his or her own analysis of the cited material.

**What is plagiarism?**

Simply put, plagiarism is the use of another's original words or ideas as though they were your own. Any time you borrow from an original source and do not give proper credit, you have committed plagiarism and violated the law.

**What are the punishments for plagiarism?**

As with any wrongdoing, the degree of intent (see below) and the nature of the offense determine its status. When plagiarism takes place in an academic setting, it is most often handled by the individual instructors and the academic institution involved. If, however, the plagiarism involves money, prizes, or job placement, it constitutes a crime punishable in court.

*Academic Punishments:* Most colleges and universities have zero tolerance for plagiarists. In fact, academic standards of intellectual honesty are often more demanding than governmental copyright laws. If you have plagiarized a paper whose copyright has run out, for example, you are less likely to be treated with any more leniency than if you had plagiarized copyrighted material. A plagiarized paper almost always results in failure for the assignment, frequently in failure for the course, and sometimes in expulsion.

*Legal Punishments:* Most cases of plagiarism are considered misdemeanors, punishable by fines of anywhere between $100 and $50,000 – and up to one year in jail. Plagiarism can also be considered a felony under certain state and federal laws. For example, if a plagiarist copies and earns more than $2,500 from copyrighted material, he or she may face up to $250,000 in fines and up to ten years in jail.

*Institutional Punishments:* Most corporations and institutions will not tolerate any form of plagiarism. There have been a significant number of cases around the world where people have lost their jobs or been denied positions as a result of plagiarism.

**PREVENTING PLAGIARISM – STUDENT RESOURCES**

In a research paper, you have to come up with your own original ideas while at the same time making reference to work that’s already been done by others. But how can you tell where their ideas end and your own begin? What’s the proper way to integrate sources in your paper? If you change some of what an author said, do you still have to cite that person?

Confusion about the answers to these questions often leads to **plagiarism**. If you have similar questions, or are concerned about preventing plagiarism, we recommend using the checklist below.

**A. Consult with your instructor:** Have questions about plagiarism? If you can’t find the answers or are unsure about something, you should ask your instructor. He or she will most likely be very happy to answer your questions. You can also check out the guidelines for citing sources properly. If you follow them, and the rest of the advice on this page, you should have no problems with plagiarism.

**B. Plan your paper:** Planning your paper well is the first and most important step you can take toward preventing plagiarism. If you know you are going to use other sources of information, you need to plan **how** you are going to include them in your paper. This means working out a balance between the ideas you have taken from other sources and your own, original ideas. Writing an outline, or coming up with a thesis statement in which you clearly formulate an argument *about* the information you find, will help establish the boundaries between your ideas and those of your sources.

**C. Take Effective Notes:** One of the best ways to prepare for a research paper is by taking thorough notes from all of your sources, so that you have much of the information organized before you begin writing. On the other hand, poor note-taking can lead to many problems – including improper citations and misquotations, both of which are forms of plagiarism! To avoid confusion about your sources, try using different colored fonts, pens, or pencils for each one, and make sure you clearly distinguish your own ideas from those you found elsewhere. Also, get in the habit of marking page numbers, and make sure that you record bibliographic information or web addresses for every source right away – finding them again later when you are trying to finish your paper can be a nightmare!

**D. Evaluate Your Sources:** Not all sources on the web are worth citing – in fact, many of them are just plain wrong. So how do you tell the good ones apart? For starters, make sure you know the **author(s)** of the page, where they got their information, and when they wrote it (getting this information is also an important step in avoiding plagiarism!). Then you should determine how credible you feel the source is: how well they support their ideas, the quality of the writing, the accuracy of the information provided, etc. We recommend using Portland Community College’s “rubrics for evaluating web pages” as an easy method of testing the credibility of your sources.