

IN YOUR OWN WORDS: AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

No. 19 in the Writing Center Handout Series

Plagiarism: Presenting another person's ideas or words as your own.

You probably know that plagiarism is a serious academic offense. But do you know when and how to cite sources? Not knowing the proper rules for citing ideas can lead to accidental plagiarism.

**Always cite everything that is not your own idea,
even if you came up with that idea on your own before you found it in sources.**

- When quoting an author directly, use quotation marks to separate the author's words from your own, and follow the quotation with a citation.
- Even if you paraphrase an author by restating his or her ideas in your own words, you must cite the source.

How to Avoid Plagiarism

- Take careful notes while researching. Note the source, the author, and the page number. Paraphrase the author properly, and use quotation marks when you copy the author's words directly.
- Cite classmates and professors just as you would cite texts.
- Use quotation marks when repeating more than three consecutive words from the source.
- Paraphrase correctly. Don't just insert synonyms for the author's words – alter the order of thoughts and change the author's language to suit your audience and the rest of your essay. Remember to cite the paraphrased information.
- If you're unsure whether to cite, ask someone – a professor, a writing center tutor, a friend, your mom.
- To learn the proper citation style, look in style guides such as *The New St. Martin's Handbook*, the MLA Guide, the APA Manual, or the guide recommended by your instructor or department.

**A properly cited paper includes citations for all dictionaries, paraphrases, and borrowed ideas,
AND a Works Cited or References page.**

What is Not Plagiarism

- Getting help from a Writing Center tutor or friend, as long as you remain the author of the paper and the originator of its ideas.
- Using the same word as the author of your source. Simple words and exact terms should be repeated in your essay for clarity (e.g., don't say "oblong leather sporting equipment" for "football").
- Not citing common knowledge. In general, if more than two sources include the same information, it's common knowledge. There are no hard and fast rules governing what is considered common knowledge, so consult your instructor when in doubt.
- Writing original essays with your own unique ideas!

For more information on paraphrasing, plagiarism, and citation of sources see

The New St. Martin's Handbook, pages 476-601
Reading and Writing in the Academic Community, pages 59-82
The Informed Writer: Using Sources in the Disciplines,
pages 35-65
MLA Documentation – [http://webster.commnet.edu/mla/
plagiarism.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/mla/plagiarism.htm)
www.ehhs.cmich.edu/~mspears/plagiarism.html



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