

A Note on PLAGIARISM

A particularly difficult skill we work to develop in college writing is using other people's ideas and texts appropriately. All knowledge builds on the contributions of others: each of us constructs our own new learning on knowledge discovered or organized by others. In our college courses, we are continually engaged with other people's ideas: we read them in texts, hear them in lecture, discuss them in class, and incorporate them into our own writing. It is important in our writing both to show our dependence on other people's work and to identify our own contribution. A major requirement of scholarly work is to give credit where it is due. Plagiarism--failing to acknowledge our debts to others--is using others' ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information.

To avoid plagiarizing, you must give credit whenever you use:

- another person's idea, opinion, or theory,
- any facts, statistics, graphs, drawings--any pieces of information--that are not common knowledge,
- quotations of another person's actual spoken or written words; or
- a paraphrase of another person's spoken or written words.

I. EXAMPLES OF PLAGIARISM AND OF APPROPRIATE USE OF OTHERS' WORDS AND IDEAS

Here's the **ORIGINAL** text, from page 1 of *Lizzie Borden: A Case Book of Family and Crime in the 1890's* by Joyce Williams, et al.:

The rise of industry, the growth of cities, and the expansion of the population were the three great developments of late nineteenth century American history. As new, larger, steam-powered factories became a feature of the American landscape in the East, they transformed farm hands into industrial laborers, and provided jobs for a rising tide of immigrants. With industry came urbanization--the growth of large cities (like Fall River, Massachusetts, where the Bordens lived) which became the centers of production as well as of commerce and trade.

Here's an **UNACCEPTABLE** paraphrase of this passage that is plagiarism:

The increase of industry, the growth of cities, and the explosion of the population were three large factors of nineteenth century America. As stem-driven companies became more visible in the eastern part of the country, they changed farm hands into factory workers and provided jobs for the large wave of immigrants. With industry came the growth of large cities like Fall River where the Bordens lived which turned into centers of commerce and trade as well as production.

The preceding passage is considered plagiarism for two reasons:

1. the writer only changed around a few words and phrases, or changed the order of the original's sentences;
2. the writer failed to cite a source for any of the ideas or facts.

If you do either or both of these things, you are plagiarizing.

[NOTE: This paragraph is also problematic because it changes the sense of several sentences (for example, "steam-driven companies" in sentence two misses the original's emphasis on factories).]

Here's an **ACCEPTABLE** paraphrase:

Fall river, where the Borden family lived, was typical of northeastern industrial cities of the nineteenth century. Steam-powered production had shifted labor from agriculture to manufacturing, and as immigrants arrived in the US, they found work in these new factories. As a result, populations grew, and large urban areas arose. Fall River was one of these manufacturing and commercial centers (Williams 1).

This is acceptable paraphrasing because:

1. the writer accurately relays the information in the original;
2. uses her own words; and
3. lets her reader know the source of her information.

Here's an example of quotation and paraphrase used together, which is also **ACCEPTABLE**:

Fall River, where the Borden family lived, was typical of northeastern industrial cities of the nineteenth century. As steam-powered production shifted labor from agriculture to manufacturing, the demand for workers "changed farm hands into factory workers": and created jobs for immigrants. In turn, growing populations increased the size of urban areas. Fall River was one of these manufacturing hubs that were also "centers of commerce and trade" (Williams 1).

This is an acceptable paraphrase because the writer:

1. records the information in the original passage accurately;
2. gives credit for the ideas in this passage; and
3. indicates which part is taken directly from her source by putting the passage in quotation marks and citing the page number.

II. STRATEGIES FOR AVOIDING PLAGIARISM:

1. Put in quotations everything that comes directly from the text--especially when taking notes.

2. Paraphrase, but be sure you are not just rearranging or replacing a few words. Instead, read over what you want to paraphrase carefully; cover up the text with your hand, or close the text so you can't see any of it (and so aren't tempted to use the text as a "guide"). Write out the idea in your own words without peeking.
3. Check your paraphrase against the original text to be sure you have not accidentally used the same phrases or words, and that the information is accurate.

III. SOME USEFUL TERMS:

Common knowledge--facts that can be found in numerous places and are likely to be known by a lot of people.

Example: John F. Kennedy was elected President of the United States in 1960. This is generally known information. You do not need to document this fact.

However, you must document facts that are not generally known and ideas that interpret facts.

Example: Bush's relationship with Congress has hindered family leave legislation. This phrase interprets; you need to cite your source.

Example: According to the American Family Leave Coalition's new book, *Family Issues and Congress*, President Bush's relationship with Congress has hindered family leave legislation (6).

Quotation--using someone's words. When you quote, place the passage you are using in quotation marks, and document the source according to a standard documentation style.

Example: Caroline Knapp, writing in the Boston Phoenix, points out that "Americans spend more than \$4 billion each year on pet food. That's four times more than they spend on food to aid all the hungry nations of the world" (B14).

Paraphrasing--using someone's ideas, but putting them in your own words. This is probably the skill you will use most when incorporating sources into your writing. Although you use your own words to paraphrase, you must still acknowledge the source of the information.

(The guidelines above are taken, with minor modifications, from "Plagiarism: What It is and How to Avoid It," found in the Indiana University Code of Student Ethics.)

For more information on and examples about plagiarism and how to avoid it, see Earl Babbie's website.