Plagiarism: what it is, what it isn’t, and how to avoid it

**Definition of plagiarism:** Using someone else’s words or ideas and offering them as your own, without properly citing the original author.

**What happens if I plagiarize?**
“**I didn’t know I had to.**”  “**I forgot to cite.**”  “**I don’t know how to cite.**”

None of these excuses will let you off the hook! Citing your sources is a fact of academic life. Most institutions have a plagiarism policy that includes judicial due process. Some will expel you if you are found guilty of plagiarism. You may also receive a poor or failing grade for plagiarized work.

**What is not plagiarism?**
- “common knowledge”

  A rule of thumb is if a fact can be found in 3 or more sources, it is considered common knowledge.

  Example: Beethoven was born in 1770.
- Expressing an idea in your own words, and giving credit.
- Using a direct quote, and giving credit.
- Stating a fact, and giving credit.
- Paraphrasing or summarizing, and giving credit.

**What IS plagiarism?**
Repeating an idea expressed by someone else, and not giving credit
It can be verbatim, changing a word or two, or even paraphrasing or summarizing

Example:

“Moreover, 79% of students surveyed stated that academic sources (e.g., books and journals) are more credible than the Internet, yet they still rely heavily on Internet sources for their research.”


√ GOOD: An article by Jason Martin describes a study at the University of Central Florida in which undergraduate students indicated they were more likely to seek research for a class assignment via the Internet, rather than through Library Resources (Martin, 8).

√ GOOD: Undergraduates seem to rely heavily on Internet sources, even though they found books and journals to be more credible (Martin, 8).

≠ BAD: Although undergraduate students say that books and journals are better sources, they continue to depend on Internet materials excessively.

In the BAD example, I even used my thesaurus to switch out some words and rearranged some words. But the red flag is I am making a statement that sounds like I know from first hand experience that this is a fact – and I didn’t do the research, Martin did.
Plagiarism is also (courtesy of Duke University Libraries):

- Purchasing a pre-written paper
- Letting someone else write a paper for you
- Paying someone else to write a paper for you
- Submitting as your own someone else's unpublished work, either with or without permission

“If you are incorporating an author’s ideas into your paper, or if the work of another has influenced your thinking on a topic, then the source must be cited.”

What shouldn’t I do?

- Copy complete sentences and pretend it is your creation
- Copy material and move the words around
- Copy material and use a couple of synonyms
- Copy material and add a couple of your own words

Avoiding plagiarism is your academic responsibility.

If you are in doubt, cite it!

Questions?

Contact or visit the Writing Center in the Library with questions

Visit webpages such as:
Duke University [http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/cite/index.html](http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/cite/index.html)
The OWL at Purdue [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/)

Anti-plagiarism web tools:
Turnitin [http://www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) Originality Checking
iThenticate [http://www.ithenticate.com](http://www.ithenticate.com) Uses database content
WriteCheck [http://writecheck.turnitin.com](http://writecheck.turnitin.com) By Turnitin, for students

Sue Slivan slivansj@sunybroome.edu