

Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism

Research writing involves adding to an ongoing conversation about a topic by citing and responding to other writers and scholars. To facilitate such conversations, scholars have developed conventions for citing outside sources in their writing, whether they are quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing.

Plagiarism is using the ideas and/or words of others in your writing without clearly acknowledging the source. Students may unknowingly plagiarize simply by citing a source incorrectly. Other acts of plagiarism—such as buying, stealing, or borrowing a paper; copying and pasting material from the internet and presenting it as your own; or hiring someone to write a paper for you—are intentional. Unfortunately, whether plagiarism occurs intentionally or accidentally, ignorance is no defense; colleges have severe penalties for confirmed cases of plagiarism, made even easier to identify by programs such as *turnitin.com*.

Understanding Plagiarism

Plagiarism may occur in a number of ways:

Direct plagiarism: The intentional copying of all or part of someone else’s writing into yours. Direct plagiarism can take many forms: writing composed by a peer, friend, family member, or anyone else and submitted by a student with or without the writer’s knowledge; writing purchased from an individual or website (e.g., an online “paper mill”); and writing that is copied in whole or part from a website, book, article, film, broadcast, or any other published or unpublished source.

Self-plagiarism: Did you know that you cannot “recycle” an essay for more than one class? Turning in an essay that was originally composed for and submitted to another course is called “self-plagiarism.” All the writing you submit for a grade must be new writing composed for a specific class and assignment. Remember, your instructors are grading you not just on a finished project but on your current process of researching, analyzing, and writing about a topic.

Mosaic plagiarism: Mosaic plagiarism refers to the practice of taking an excerpt from a source and replacing key words with synonyms to make the excerpt appear to be original work. Some students who commit mosaic plagiarism may believe they are simply paraphrasing. Remember that a successful paraphrase will convey the main idea of a source using completely new sentence structure and wording. Just like with quotations, all paraphrased material should be followed by a citation.

Accidental plagiarism: Sometimes plagiarism occurs unintentionally. For example, the writer might misquote a source, forget to include a citation, cite the source incorrectly, or misunderstand how to

paraphrase or quote a source. Treat citations with great precision. **Even if you did not intend to plagiarize, you can be penalized.**

What does not need documentation?

- Your own **observations, opinions, thoughts, or conclusions** about a subject.
- Your own **results** obtained through lab or field experiments or surveys.
- Your own **artwork, photographs, video, or audio**.
- **Common knowledge**, which generally refers to facts that can be found in numerous places and are very likely to be known by your audience.
- **Well known tales or folklore**. You can refer to Cinderella and her lost slipper without citing it to a particular version of the story (unless you are writing about or comparing specific versions).
- **Common sense observations**. “Spilled water on the floor is likely to make someone slip and fall.”
- **Generally accepted interpretations of facts**. “Pollution is bad for the environment.”

What does need documentation?

- **ANY** information from an **outside source**, unless it is considered common knowledge for your audience.
- **Facts, statistics, graphs, drawings, photographs, works of art**.
- **Ideas, opinions or interpretations by anyone other than you**. It is a good idea to clearly introduce this type of information by naming the source within your sentence, in addition to the proper parenthetical citation format. E.g: Laura Gomez believes that cats are far superior to dogs (7).
- **Exact quotations from a source**. You **must** use quotation marks around the quoted material and check that you have copied the original wording exactly. Follow the quotation with a parenthetical citation.
- **Summaries or paraphrases of material from a source**. Some students mistakenly believe they must only cite direct quotations, but paraphrased material must also be accompanied by a citation. Carefully check any summaries or paraphrases against the original to make sure you have conveyed the information accurately in your own words.

Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism

- **Learn to paraphrase**: When restating another writer’s ideas in your own words, set the source aside and do not look at it. When you use the original text to help you guide your paraphrasing, you are more likely to mimic the source’s wording and sentence structure. Stepping away from the source helps you absorb and process the information before restating it in a way that makes sense to you.

- **Learn citation styles:** To cite correctly, you will need to familiarize yourself with the citation style your professor wants you to use (usually MLA, APA, or Chicago/Turabian). If you need help with citation, speak with your professor or visit any Collin College Writing Center.
- **Stay organized:** Rather than building works cited entries (or reference page/bibliography entries) at the end of your writing process, create them as you go. That way, when you need to quote or paraphrase from a source, you can easily type the corresponding parenthetical citation into your paragraph as you write. Tip: collect your works cited entries in a Word document and gather any quotes or ideas you want to paraphrase from each source under each entry.

Of course, not every online writing center is created equally. The centers that seem to be the most effective are those that have established clear parameters and goals for online sessions. According to David Coogan, "When email tutorials work, so it seems, they work by engaging this dialectic. They work when we somehow negotiate a scene of learning" (559). Of course, this negotiating should occur in any tutoring session, not just those taking place online...

Sources with Selected Quotations

Coogan, David. "Towards a Rhetoric of Online Tutoring." *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice*, edited by Robert W. Barnett and Jacob S. Blumner, Allyn and Bacon, 2001, pp. 555-60.

- "The goal of an on-line tutorial must never be to fix meaning on the "page" but to engage meaning in a dialectic. We need open texts. We need ambiguity" (558).
- "When email tutorials work, so it seems, they work by engaging this dialectic. They work when we somehow negotiate a scene of learning" (559).

Severino, Carol, and Shih-Ni Prim. "Second Language Writing Development and the Role of Tutors: A Case Study of an Online Writing Center 'Frequent Flyer.'" *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2016, pp. 143-83.

- "We recommend that writing centers adapt their own version of the self-assessment survey in Appendix I for research, for tutor training, and also for their tutors to use and