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## PLAGIARISM

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Plagiarism is a form of stealing. When you plagiarize, you steal intellectual property, i.e., other people's ideas, concepts, and words. Whether intentional or completely unintentional, plagiarism can lead to severe consequences, such as lowered grades, public humiliation, dismissal from college, loss of a job, etc. Here are two real-life examples of the consequences of plagiarism:

In 2003, a rising *New York Times* reporter, Jason Blair, was forced to resign his position after the information in his articles was found to be copied from other sources.

In 2005, a student at Nova Southeastern University received an F on a paper for failure to properly identify all of the cited information within the text [even though it was properly listed in the Reference section].

### Forms of Plagiarism

- Careless paraphrasing
- Poor documentation
- Inappropriate assistance
- Recycling

**Careless paraphrasing.** This occurs when the text is not paraphrased well. Changing a few words throughout an otherwise untouched quote does not make it a paraphrase. A sentence which retains most of the author's unique wording and appears to be structurally close to the original is not a good paraphrase.

<i>Original quote:</i>	“Adult learning research helps to explain why immersion is so important” (Beth Hewett and Christa Ehmann, <i>Preparing educators for online writing instruction</i> , 2004, p. 11).
<i>Careless paraphrasing:</i>	Research in adult learning assists us in explaining why immersion is so important.
<i>Proper paraphrasing (MLA):</i>	According to Hewett and Ehmann, current research gives us an insight into why immersion is a valuable aspect of adult learning (11).
<i>Proper paraphrasing (APA):</i>	According to Hewett and Ehmann (2004), current research gives us an insight into why immersion is a valuable aspect of adult learning (p. 11).

**Poor documentation.** This is a very common form of plagiarism, which can take the shape of incomplete citations, absent citations, or overstretched citations. Incomplete citations often result from students forgetting to note the location of a particular quote during the research stage. If they are unable to find the location of the quote later, the quote might end up being clearly marked by the quotation marks, but without proper identification of the source.

<i>Incomplete citation:</i>	It appears that “student political attitudes defy traditional labels” (Levine and Cureton).
<i>Proper documentation (MLA):</i>	It appears that “student political attitudes defy traditional labels” (Levine & Cureton 31).
<i>Proper documentation (APA):</i>	It appears that “student political attitudes defy traditional labels” (Levine & Cureton, 1998, p. 31).

Absent citations are frequently associated with paraphrases. Since paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks, they can easily be mistaken for the student’s original words. Even though paraphrases change the wording of the original quote, they still represent someone else’s ideas and must be cited.

<i>Absent citation (paraphrase):</i>	The political affiliation of today’s students is not as clearly defined. In fact, often student political views go completely against the traditional labels.
<i>Proper documentation (MLA):</i>	The political affiliation of today’s students is not as clearly defined. In fact, often student political views go completely against the traditional labels (Levine & Cureton).
<i>Proper documentation (APA):</i>	The political affiliation of today’s students is not as clearly defined. In fact, often student political views go completely against the traditional labels (Levine & Cureton, 1998).

A similar example of absent citation is when invented terminology is used without giving credit to the author.

<i>Absent citation (terminology):</i>	At the intersection of language and culture lies a concept that we might call “languaculture.”
<i>Proper documentation (MLA):</i>	At the intersection of language and culture lies a concept that Michael Agar called “languaculture” (60).
<i>Proper documentation (APA):</i>	At the intersection of language and culture lies a concept that Michael Agar (1994) called “languaculture” (p. 60).

At the other end of this continuum are overstretched citations, in which students put a source name after their own words making it look like none of their writing is original. This happens when students mix paraphrases with their own thoughts within one paragraph and then put a source name at the end of the whole paragraph. Lack of quotation marks and citations makes it almost impossible to identify which part of the paragraph is quoted and which is original. Therefore, the instructor is likely to think that the whole paragraph has been “lifted” or plagiarized.

*Overstretched citation:*

Some of the behavioral problems of children with mental retardation stem from their limited verbal communication skills compared to other children their age. This may cause them to withdraw from interpersonal relationships or seek attention in inappropriate ways. Inappropriate social behavior can be caused by a number of factors, such as children’s inability to identify acceptable standards of behavior, or frustration brought on by scholastic failure. Children may use inappropriate behavior as a way to gain acceptance from other children (Patton et al., 1989).

*More appropriate (APA):*

Some of the behavioral problems of children with mental retardation stem from their limited verbal communication skills compared to other children their age. This may cause them to withdraw from interpersonal relationships or seek attention in inappropriate ways. **Patton et al. (1989) contend** that inappropriate social behavior can be caused by a number of factors, such as children’s inability to identify acceptable standards of behavior, or frustration brought on by scholastic failure. **They further state** that children may use inappropriate behavior as a way to gain acceptance from other children (p. 75).

**NOTE: While paraphrased information *does not require* a page number, it may be helpful to the readers if the page number is provided. Neither APA nor MLA prohibits placing page numbers after paraphrases.**

**Inappropriate assistance.** This can range from asking a family member or a friend to write a section of the paper for you to paying a person or an organization to produce a complete (original) paper. Each paper you write is expected to be a product of your own original thoughts. Presenting a work produced by somebody else as your own (even with their expressed consent) is plagiarism. A variation of this is writing a paper that is simply a collection of quotes, lacking any original input from you. Even if every single quote and paraphrase is properly cited, your work would be considered “lifted” from other sources, or plagiarized.

**Recycling.** This happens when you attempt to submit a paper that had been previously submitted by you for another class. A variation of it may be using big chunks of a previously written paper to create a new paper. Even though you are using your own work, resubmitting the same piece of writing for a different class is considered plagiarism. As a general rule, each paper you produce should be on the whole an original piece of writing. You may be able to reuse the research you did in another class; however, you would need to gain your instructor’s permission in advance to do so.

## **Cases Where Documentation is not Needed**

- **When information used is common knowledge**

Ex: George Washington was the first president of the United States.

- **When using well-known quotes**

Ex: “We shall overcome”

- **When using familiar proverbs**

Ex: You can’t judge a book by its cover.

## **Ways to Avoid Plagiarism**

- Make a list of the writers and viewpoints you discover in your research and use the list to double-check the presentation of material in your paper.
- Keep the following three categories distinct in your notes: your ideas, your summaries of others’ materials (paraphrases), and exact wording you copy (direct quotes).
- Write down all of the necessary citation information as soon as you use the source. This way you will not have to search for it later on.
- Add to the list of References/Works Cited as you use the source. This way you will not have to spend extra time on putting together the list of referenced materials.
- Make sure each of your in-text citations has a corresponding entry in the References (APA) or the Works Cited (MLA) section.
- Use lead-in words and phrases (ex.: according to) to identify the beginning of paraphrases.
- Learn the appropriate citation style used in your discipline (ex.: APA/MLA) . Know how to cite a direct quote or a paraphrase.
- Keep an appropriate (APA/MLA) Reference Guide handy, and refer to it when you have questions.
- Ask a tutor to double-check your work.

References:

Gibaldi, J. (2003). *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th Ed. New York: MLA.