

## SDI Plagiarism Guide

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### Plagiarism Guide

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Simply put, plagiarism is taking someone else's work, whether that be something written, an image, or even an idea, and passing it off as your own. It's a form of intellectual theft, and depending on when and where the plagiarism is occurring, severe consequences could be invoked either from within the institution the plagiarism is occurring or, in larger more financially tied cases, legal repercussions could follow. The problem is, it can be a bit more nuanced and complicated than just, "Don't steal. Always give credit where credit is due." What follows is a guide on how to make sure you don't fall on the wrong side of the plagiarism line.



## **Why Do We Plagiarize?**

Besides the obvious moral and ethical reasons involved, there are other factors that students should keep in mind when the thought of plagiarism rears its head. Most students who plagiarize, don't do so with any malicious intent. They aren't looking to cause harm or watch the world burn. Instead, many justify or rationalize their decision to plagiarize due to a variety of life factors or personal feelings towards the course and material. A few examples of this may be:

- I don't need to know the information, so why bother putting in that effort.
- I don't have the time for this assignment because of work/family obligations.
- I will only do it this once.
- No one will know. No one will get hurt.
- I'm not feeling well and won't make the due date in time if I do it myself.
- I'm not the only one.

It's easy to get caught in that mind trap, which all the examples above represent, when we're pressed for time, feel uninspired, or feel inadequate when faced with a certain assignment. In all the above instances, all these rationalizations stem from doubt and worry, which are much easier to handle with transparency. Instead of rationalizing reasons to plagiarize, reach out to your instructor, a tutor, a friend, and ask for help. It's much easier to avoid plagiarism when we allow ourselves to ask for help, get clarification, and explain our circumstances. Plagiarism might be alluring because of how quick it is, but the long-term detriments aren't worth it (please see [STUDENT INTEGRITY POLICY](#)).

The above examples are examples of intentional plagiarism, but perhaps the most prevalent type of plagiarism is unintentional plagiarism, also known as accidental plagiarism. As the name suggests, this type of plagiarism is committed without the intention of plagiarizing. When this occurs, it is usually due to a lack of knowledge or clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism.

## **When is it Plagiarism? What Does it Look Like?**

### **Intentional Plagiarism:**

- Copying material word-for-word (images and other media too) without providing the correct credit.
- Buying a paper or having someone write the paper for you.
- Copying an entire article and claiming it as your own.
- Passing off someone else's ideas as your own (failure to cite for credit).
- Falsifying citations.



### **Unintentional Plagiarism:**

- Misquoting a source when using a direct quote.
- Failure to cite a source you're quoting or paraphrasing from.
- Failure to put quote in quotation marks if you're directly quoting from source instead of paraphrasing.
- Not citing a source that isn't considered common knowledge.
- Using sources and quotes to make up a majority of your paper, even if properly cited; your words should outweigh your sources.

### **How to Avoid Unintentional Plagiarism**

Avoiding intentional plagiarism is as straightforward as, "Don't take someone's work and pretend it's your own." It's unintentional plagiarism that really forces the writer to focus on what they're doing and how they're implementing their sources. One cannot plead ignorance when it comes to unintentional plagiarism, despite its name. The reason for this, is that it's the duty of every writer, whether they be a student or an acclaimed novelist, to know and understand all the forms of plagiarism and how to avoid them. If you're taking on the task to write a paper, you have to know how to avoid plagiarism, as that's part of the task as well.

To avoid plagiarism, either intentional or unintentional, it's first important to know what it is, which has been covered above. Once we know what plagiarism is, we can start getting into the How-To elements of it. Both intentional and unintentional plagiarism can occur when there is proper citation or crediting at work, so let's break down when you should be citing in order to avoid plagiarism:

- Anytime you're using a source's exact wording.
- When you're using ideas, phrases, words, or any material from any medium that you are pulling from.
- Information acquired via interviews, conversations, whether they be spoken or written.
- Any reprinting, reusing, or repurposing of images, video, audio, writing, etc.

Just as there are times where citation is a must, there are also moments where you do not need to cite:

- When you are stating accepted facts; i.e. smoking cigarettes is dangerous.
- When you are writing from personal experience; careful here, if the personal experience is the crux of your argument or paper, you'll still need to gather sources to support that experience to prove it's not a one-off.
- When you are stating or referring to common knowledge.
- When you are presenting your own firsthand results from studies, tests, or other research methods.



## Direct Quotes and Paraphrasing Tips

The two methods of bringing in sources to help support your paper are called direct quoting and paraphrasing. Direct quoting is just as it sounds; you take a sentence or sentences from another source and put them into your paper word-for-word. You put that quote in quotation marks = “Using quotations marks immediately shows the reader the words are being taken from elsewhere.” **Paraphrasing** on the other hand is about taking a direct quote and putting it into your own words. The key for paraphrasing is to “translate” the quote into your own style. ***Both versions still require you to cite the source so we know where the ideas, words, etc, are coming from.***

- Don’t rely on just direct quotes or paraphrasing; it’s good to have a mix.
- It’s often helpful to introduce your source before quoting from it (see the SDI Citation Style Guide for examples).
- Whether you’re paraphrasing or using direct quotes, make sure to provide an evaluation of the quote in relation to your topic directly after = It’s important for you to make those connections for your readers.
- Paraphrasing is best used to take the place of what would be a long direct quote. Try to paraphrase direct quotes that would take up more than four lines, unless it’s crucial to have the exact wording.
- When you do use a direct quote that is more than four lines, you’ll need to use what is often called a block quote. This requires you to indent the quote on both sides and give it it’s own space. Please refer to the SDI Sample Paper for an example of how that should look.
- When paraphrasing, write down the key concepts from the quote you’re looking at. Then, work on putting that quote in your own words **WITHOUT** looking at the quote. Compare how your paraphrase looks in comparison to the quote. = Try and make it as simple as possible.
- Even if you’re paraphrasing, you still need to cite the source.

Direct quoting is straightforward, and for the correct method on using direct quotes, please refer to the *SDI Style Guide*. Paraphrasing takes a bit more effort, though it’s crucial that a paper contains both direct quotes and paraphrasing. Below is an example from the Purdue Online Writing Lab that offers a very detailed look at what strong paraphrasing should look like in comparison to the original:

*Note that the examples in this section use MLA style for in-text citation.*

### **THE ORIGINAL PASSAGE:**

*Students frequently overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the final [research] paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes. Lester, James D. *Writing Research Papers*. 2nd ed., 1976, pp. 46-47.*

### **A LEGITIMATE PARAPHRASE:**

*In research papers, students often quote excessively, failing to keep quoted material down to a desirable level. Since the problem usually originates during note taking, it is essential to minimize the material recorded verbatim (Lester 46-47).*

**AN ACCEPTABLE SUMMARY:**

*Students should take just a few notes in direct quotation from sources to help minimize the amount of quoted material in a research paper (Lester 46-47).*

**A PLAGIARIZED VERSION:**

*Students often use too many direct quotations when they take notes, resulting in too many of them in the final research paper. In fact, probably only about 10% of the final copy should consist of directly quoted material. So it is important to limit the amount of source material copied while taking notes.*

(OWL, 2020)

Regardless of whether you're paraphrasing or using direct quotes, it's imperative that you do not take another writer's work or words out of context. Make sure you're staying faithful to the material you're paraphrasing or quoting from, as it's an ethical responsibility to stay true to the source material.

### **Personal Experience and Plagiarism**

Unless you're writing a reflection piece, which you'll often find at the end of a course, personal experience in an academic essay requires a bit more finesse to keep any plagiarism out of it. Whereas in reflection writing, the personal experience of the writer is the subject and in the forefront of the assignment, personal experience should take a back seat in academic papers. The main reason for this, is that academic papers require you to not only write on a topic, but to find evidence and support from other sources to hold up that topic. While reflection papers and those based around personal experience rely only on remembering, academic papers require higher levels of thinking, such as synthesis. Synthesis is the cornerstone of all academic writing, as it's there where the evidence of high level learning is made clear.

Synthesis is taking multiple ideas and weaving them together in order to make something new. This means using not only personal experience if relevant, but more importantly, drawing on other research, sources, etc. to fashion something original. Writing from personal experience requires only knowledge of the event, the ability to recall said experience. While this is helpful, it's not what academic writing focuses on. If you're relying on personal experience, it needs other materials/references to help support those theories or ideas you're exploring.

Personal experience in an academic essay, without sources to help support or highlight it, may have the feel of a plagiarized paper. Your audience does not know where the information being presented came from, and only have your word to go on. An academic paper where the only source is the author lacks the authority that a well-researched and supported paper has. Even the most qualified experts in their fields will still have a treasure trove of research to support their experience, theories, ideas, etc. Unless it's a reflection, always have sources to highlight your points.



## **The 80/20 Rule**

Though some might not think so, a paper that is correctly cited all the way through can still be considered a form of plagiarism if the cited material outweighs your own material. Your paper should be about supporting your own ideas with research, not the other way around. A good way to keep this in check is the idea of the 80/20 rule; meaning your paper should be 80% you and 20% research support.

Don't use too many sources. A good rule of thumb is a source per paragraph. You may feel inclined since you've done so much research to include everything you found, but don't; make sure your choices are deliberate.

- Don't use research support to fill out your paper. Use it wisely and where it matters.
- Never quote or paraphrase without following it up with an analysis in your own words regarding the context of your paper. It's up to you to connect the support to your topic.
- Your analysis of the research cited should always be longer than the cited material being used (i.e. if you're direct quoting a two sentence line, make sure your analysis is at least three).
- If you're ever worried about there being too much support, put all your quotes or paraphrasing in a single word document to see what the word count adds up to. Compare that to the overall wordcount of the entire paper.

## **Too Long, Didn't Read:**

For some quick and easy tips / reminders to avoid plagiarism, keep these qualities in mind:

- Always give credit where credit is due.
- Even if you properly cite, having your paper be mostly consist of quotes or paraphrasing from other sources is still considered plagiarism.
- There's no excuse for plagiarism. Just as you must know the rules of the road before driving, familiarize yourself with these rules before writing.
- Plagiarism doesn't just have to do with writing; images, ideas, video, audio, etc. can all be plagiarized.
- Paraphrasing/Summarizing source material without citing is still plagiarism.
- Misrepresenting or misquoting one of your sources is a form of plagiarism; it's a writer's ethical responsibility not to twist people's words.
- Whenever you're unsure of what to do, reach out to your instructor, review the above material, or explore one of the many resource links below.
- For academic papers, if you're going to use personal experience use it to guide your research, your ideas, but don't let it be the subject of your paper. Always have research to go along with it.



## **Suggested Resources**

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Plagiarism as a big and nuanced topic. The guide above provides an overview, but please also explore these other resources on plagiarism:

- Purdue Online Writing Lab: [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding\\_plagiarism/best\\_practices.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding_plagiarism/best_practices.html)
- Duke University Plagiarism Tutorial: <https://plagiarism.duke.edu/avoiding/>
- Jackson State Writing Center: <https://www.jscc.edu/academics/programs/writing-center/documents/plagiarism.pdf>
- APA Plagiarism Guide: <https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids/avoiding-plagiarism.pdf>
- GCF Learn Free: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzZsButRaHs>
- The University of Maryland Writing Center: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1qo10dG5Gw>
- Walden University <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1141&context=jsc>