



The Writing Center



"To enable student success through improved writing skills."

PLAGIARISM AND PARAPHRASING

If you use someone else's ideas or words in your academic writing, you must give credit to, or cite, your source. Failure to acknowledge the person (or people) from whom you borrowed information is considered a form of stealing, called **plagiarism**, and it is a serious offense. Even if you did not intend to plagiarize, if your teacher suspects or can prove you plagiarized, you could face serious consequences.

Many actions may be viewed a plagiarism: closely paraphrasing an author's work, buying or borrowing another's paper, paying someone to write your paper, downloading a paper off the Internet, or turning in a paper you wrote for another class.

Avoiding Plagiarism

You may wonder what you need to cite and what you do not. Understanding what citation accomplishes will help provide the answer. When you acknowledge source material, you give credit to the people from whom you borrowed the information. You would probably not want people to use your original idea without giving you credit, so you should give your sources the same courtesy. Also, researching and crediting authoritative sources makes you more credible. It shows that you are not simply writing your opinion or making up facts. Finally, citation helps those interested in your topic to locate your source material so they can perform research for themselves.

Considering these reasons, you would not need to cite something that is common knowledge. Most of us know the chemical equation for water is H₂O and the Bill of Rights contains ten amendments. You would, however, need to cite any ideas or words you borrowed either directly or in paraphrase. Consider the following example sentence:

With money from the state lottery, Georgia guarantees preschool classes for every four-year-old child.

If you want to use this quote exactly as it appears in the February 3, 1997, Newsweek article "Some Hope for College" by Daniel Pedersen and Pat Wingert, you must place quotes around the sentence and add some accepted form of documentation.

Missouri State Writing Center ♦ Plagiarism and Paraphrasing

The following example uses MLA documentation style:

According to Pedersen and Wingert, Georgia state legislators, “With money from the state lottery, Georgia guarantees preschool classes for every four-year-old” (44).

The first time you use a source, it is a good idea to introduce the author at the beginning of the sentence (rather than just in parenthesis at the end of the sentence) by establishing the person’s credentials.

You do not have to use the writer’s exact words; you can paraphrase the important idea of the passage. You would cite a paraphrase in a similar way.

Example:

Georgia plans to use its lottery revenues so that all children can attend preschool (Pedersen and Wingert 44).

A paraphrase that uses the author’s words or the same pattern of words is considered plagiarism also.

The following examples are **not** acceptable paraphrases, even if you give the author credit:

With funds from its own lottery, Georgia promises preschool courses for all youngsters (Pedersen and Wingert 44).

Georgia guarantees classes for each preschool with money from its state lottery (Pedersen and Wingert 44).

Although the first sentence uses different words, it uses the same pattern of words as the original and is, therefore, a form of plagiarism. Likewise, the second sentence changes the sentence structure but relies on the same words as the original.