



What is Plagiarism And How to Avoid It



Plagiarism is essentially using someone else's work or thoughts and passing them off as one's own. The term "Plagiarism" comes from the Latin word "plagarius," which means "kidnapper." It is more than simply copying down words or text: a good general rule is that any time you use someone else's work as a source of ideas or inspiration, be it text, song lyrics or even art, giving credit is required.

In this "Internet Age," many might question the possibility of maintaining the free and constant flow without plagiarizing – after all, the information is free, right? Information is continuously bombarding information users at a rate previously unheard of. This brings credit for work done. The best plan to bridge these philosophical gaps? : educate students as to what plagiarism is, and consistently teach them, and then require them, to correctly cite the resources they use.

Many people think of plagiarism as copying another's work, or borrowing someone else's original ideas. But terms like "copying" and "borrowing" can disguise the seriousness of the offense.

Much of your education will involve reading and learning about what others have written and integrating those ideas into your own thinking and writing. Learning from others and integrating their ideas into your own work is what scholarship is all about. It may be time consuming and at first a difficult thing to do, but time and practice can change all that.

In the United States and many other countries, the expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property, and is protected by copyright laws, just like original inventions. Almost all forms of expression fall under copyright protection as long as they are recorded in some media (such as a book or a computer file).

All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the bulk of your work, whether you give credit to that source or not.



Changing the words of an original source is *not* sufficient to prevent plagiarism. If you have retained the essential idea of an original source, and have not cited it, then no matter how drastically you may have altered its context or presentation, *you have still plagiarized*

Common Definitions of Plagiarism:

There are a variety of different definitions of plagiarism, all with subtle nuances of their own. Some are very straightforward and to the point, while others are a bit more elaborate. Listed below is a sampling of common definitions:

1. From: Random House / Webster's College Dictionary. NY: Random House, 1991.

Plagiarism: The unauthorized use of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own.

Plagiarize: 1. to take and use by plagiarism. 2. to take and use ideas, passages, etc. from (another's work) by plagiarism.



2. From: The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Plagiarism: 1. The act of plagiarizing. 2. Something plagiarized.

Plagiarize: 1. to use and pass off (the ideas or writings of another) as one's own.
2. to appropriate for use as one's own passages or ideas from another.
3. to put forth as original to oneself the ideas or words of another.



3. From: "Plagiarism.Org: Learning Center." Plagiarism.Org. 2008. 27 May 2008 <<http://www.plagiarism.org>>.

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Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism.



4. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms. Oxford University Press, 2001, 2004. *Answers.com* 27 May. 2008. <http://www.answers.com/topic/plagiarism>

plagiarism [**play**ˌjɑːrɪzəm], the theft of ideas (such as the plots of narrative or dramatic works) or of written passages or works, where these are passed off as one's own work without acknowledgement of their true origin; or a piece of writing thus stolen. Plagiarism is not always easily separable from imitation, adaptation, or [pastiche](#), but is usually distinguished by its dishonest intention. A person practicing this form of literary theft is a *plagiarist*. The older term *plagiary* was applied both to plagiarisms and to plagiarists.

I Know How Plagiarism is Defined, Now How Do I Deal With It?

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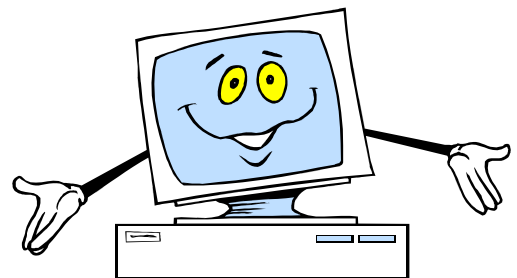
Cardinal rule: to avoid plagiarism, one must give credit whenever one uses:



- ✎ another person's idea, opinion, theory or words
- ✎ facts, statistics, graphs, drawings or other forms of information that are not common knowledge (Common knowledge is information that you know, or would expect others to know without having to look it up!)
- ✎ quotations of another person's spoken or written words or ideas
- ✎ paraphrases of another person's work or words

**this includes such things as music lyrics or composition, poetry, computer graphics, video clips and the like!

Remember... that includes Information gathered from books, newspapers, magazines, videos, television, radio, and especially information retrieved through me!



How does one give credit?? Do your own work, and use your own words. If you need to borrow words, thoughts, images, ideas from someone else, give them the credit for it! The answer is simple: **Cite your sources!** And when you do, be sure to cite them correctly!

What is a citation?

A citation is the way you tell your teacher or other readers that the material contained in your assignment came from another source. It will also give your readers the information necessary to find the source you used again, perhaps for research of their own!

Citation formats vary according to the *type* of material you are referencing. For example, a citation for information taken from a book is going to look slightly different than the citation for information taken from the internet or a database.

While there are several formatting standards (APA, MLA), they all have specific rules they follow. Merrimack Middle School follows the MLA (Modern Language Association) formatting standard, 7th ed.

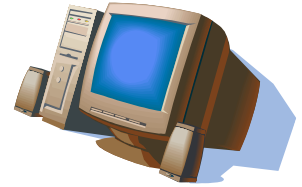
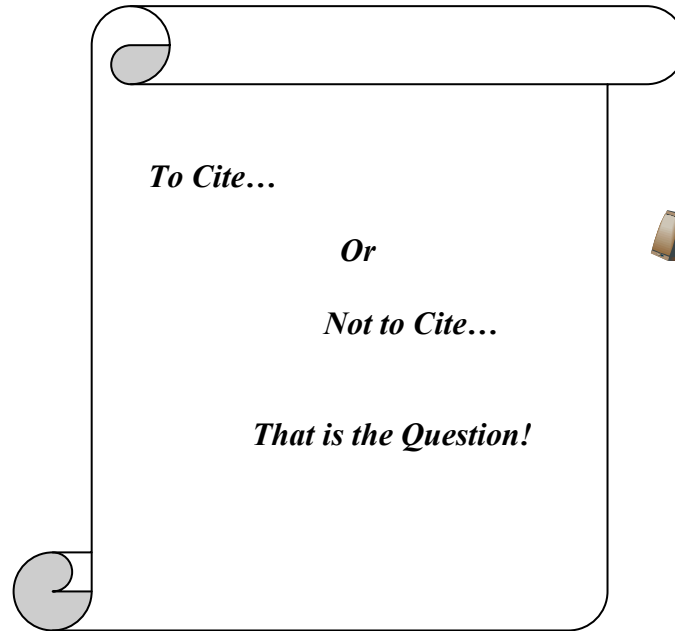
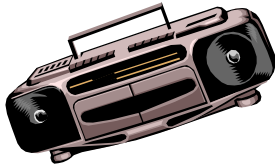


The following information is required in most citations:

- Author(s) or Editor(s) of work
- Title of Work
- Publication information, including place of publication, Publisher and date of publication
- Format in which the work is published (print, web)

Situations when you DO need to cite sources:

- ★ When you have provided a summary.
A summary is a restatement in your own words of the main thoughts or ideas contained within a source. It gives a general idea of the ideas in a source without providing the specifics!
- ★ When you write a review.
A review requires you to give specific details about a time, place, and other characteristics of an artistic event, provides a summary of the event and then gives an opinion about that event – many times with supporting examples.
- ★ When you paraphrase.
A paraphrase is a restatement in your own words of specific ideas and information from a source. **The purpose of a paraphrase is to maintain your individual writing style throughout your paper – it isn't simply taking another person's work and substituting a few words here and there!
- ★ When you use a quotation.
A quotation is an exact reproduction of material from another source. When using a quote, it is imperative that the wording remain the same as that provided in the original. – And don't forget the quotation marks! Another hint?: Quotations should be used as sparingly as possible and only in cases you wish to emphasize your point!



Situations when you DON'T need to cite sources:

- ★ When the words, images or work is your own!
- ★ When the information is considered common knowledge (Information is readily known by almost everyone and there is no need to look it up to understand what it is – i.e. the sky is blue.)
- ★ When information is available in many other resources without documentation.
- ★ When it is a common saying or expression.
- ★ When the author or creator of a work is widely known. (For example, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter* does not need to be cited, but if you use a specific portion of text from the work, that statement would need to be cited!)
- ★ When the information can be found in a general dictionary.

Information about citing sources can be found in the library. For the purposes of work at Merrimack Middle School, please remember that we adhere to MLA (Modern Language Association) formatting.



Things That Make You Go Hmmm?

Does it matter how much information I copy or use from a source?

Not in determining if you have plagiarized or not. Any time you take information from another source, you need to cite it, plain and simple. Remember, too, that a work that is almost entirely plagiarized will incur greater penalties than a work that includes only a small amount of plagiarized material.

What if I didn't *intend* to plagiarize, but I did?

Good notetaking practices will certainly help you here. If you have your notes, research and even drafts to back you up a teacher may be able to help you rework your information into a piece that isn't plagiarized. If you are able to demonstrate, based on the amount that was borrowed and the way that you have incorporated it into your work, and you *reasonably* thought you were doing the right thing, your teacher may be far more sympathetic to your cause. Remember, though, that ignorance is never an excuse!

What is the big deal with copying someone else's work, anyways?

First of all, by merely copying someone else's work or by cutting and pasting, you learn nothing. Additionally, plagiarism cheats writers and researchers of the work *they* did honestly and ultimately makes it difficult for future writers and researchers to build upon others' work and results.

What about a paper I downloaded from a pay site on the internet? Is that plagiarism?

The first question to ask is "did you write the paper?" If no, that is cheating. The next logical question is did you cite your sources? The answer to that would be no, because you merely downloaded and copied it and submitted it as your own. That qualifies as plagiarism!



I Get It, I Get It....So How Can I Be Sure To Avoid Plagiarizing?

There are several simple things you can do to avoid being accused of plagiarism:

- ✦ Always give credit to a source you use, whether it is for a quote, a fact, opinion, statistic, image, graph – basically for any information that you did not come up with on your own.
- ✦ Be sure to use quotations if you are using another person’s work or words.
- ✦ Take lots of really good notes – be careful to document where you got the information and it helps if those notes are just lists of facts or thoughts. One pitfall is taking notes using complete sentences.
- ✦ Write your draft or outline your project using only your notes. Put away books, reference materials and limit access to websites or databases. It is helpful to start with an outline to make sure you have enough quality, well-rounded information.
- ✦ Resist the urge to copy and paste any information – into your research, or your paper itself.
- ✦ Avoid paper mill sites that are available on the Internet, paid or free. Remember, if someone else wrote it, it isn’t “yours” – even if you paid for it!
- ✦ Have a parent, friend or teacher proofread your work to see if they can detect any potential issues or problems.
- ✦ Make sure your bibliography is as complete and accurate as possible. It gives the reader a chance to look for clarification or even check the quality of your sources.
- ✦ Don’t let your sources take over your work. You have done the research, taken the notes, written the drafts. Just retell what you have learned in your own words!

Done!

