

## PLAGIARISM AND HOW TO AVOID IT

Ideas and words are the currency of the academic realm. Your career as a scholar will depend on your ability to formulate and express your views, particularly in writing. It is therefore essential that you develop your own voice, and that you respect other scholars' work by acknowledging it appropriately at all times. Plagiarism, the act of using others' material without proper acknowledgment, is a serious offense, one which can end an academic career. Before embarking on graduate study, you need to be aware of what constitutes plagiarism, and how to avoid it.

### Conventions for Documentation of Sources

In graduate-level and professional academic work, you will be relying heavily on sources. Virtually every paper you write will make reference to the work of others. In order to avoid ambiguity about who is responsible for any given idea, every discipline has conventions for acknowledging sources. Footnotes, endnotes and in-text citations not only give credit to the people whose work you have consulted; they are also a courtesy to your readers, enabling them to go to your sources and easily locate specific material.

There are many sets of conventions for documenting sources; a few of the best known are the MLA (Modern Language Association), the APA (American Psychological Association) and Chicago-style (based on *The Chicago Manual of Style*). Which system you should learn depends on your field. Some departments will require that you use a specific system; others will allow you to choose one of several widely accepted systems. One of your first tasks as a graduate student should be to find out which documentation system is best for you, and to learn that system. The sooner you know how to construct correct citations and bibliographic entries, the easier your essay writing will be. You will also be in less danger of falling into inadvertent plagiarism.

### Intentional and Unintentional Plagiarism

Intentionally taking another writer's material and presenting it as one's own is a clear act of theft – one which most graduate students would never consider committing. However, it is also possible to plagiarize unintentionally, and such plagiarism is as serious as conscious plagiarism. You will be held responsible for any misuse of your sources, whether or not it was intentional. Therefore, in addition to learning the correct format for documenting sources, you need to be sure you understand *when* you are required to acknowledge a source, and *how* to structure your research and writing in order to avoid slipping into unintentional plagiarism.

### What Material Needs to Be Cited?

Some students believe that a bibliography or "Works Cited" list at the end of an essay constitutes adequate acknowledgment of their sources. This is not the case. Some students believe that they only need to cite sources within an essay if they have quoted directly. This is also wrong. You must provide a citation virtually *any time* you include information you have acquired from a source other than your own head. The exceptions are matters of fact, such as dates, birthplaces, and basic information about historic events, which are public knowledge. If you're in doubt about whether or not to cite, cite. It's better to err on the side of scrupulousness.

## **Direct Quotation vs. Paraphrase**

Sometimes students worried about plagiarism end up overquoting. This leads to awkward essays which are patchworks of other voices, rather than having a cohesive voice of their own. Direct quotation is appropriate only when you're performing close textual analysis, or when the specific *wording* of the source is important for some other reason. If you're introducing an author's neologism or specialized term, or if you think that the style of the passage is so eloquent that it merits particular attention, then quote directly; otherwise, paraphrase. In *either case*, you will need to cite your source.

Paraphrasing is a very important skill, and one which you can improve through practice. If you can accurately put another author's ideas into your own words, this shows that you've truly mastered the material. Summarizing longer passages also helps you save space; learning to reproduce concisely the *gist* of what you've read will allow you to cover large quantities of material efficiently and to focus on the points that are of specific interest to you. An effective paraphrase does *not* share vocabulary or structure with its source; it rethinks, restructures and rewords the material to make it fit your voice and context. Please note that altering a few features of the original text does *not* constitute valid paraphrase. If you make an active sentence into a passive one, change a few words, and present this material without quotation marks, you are still plagiarizing, *even if* you cite the source.

## **Research Techniques**

Inadvertent plagiarism is most often the result of sloppy use of notes. In order to be able to cite and paraphrase correctly, you have to keep detailed records while conducting your research. Good research habits will save you a tremendous amount of trouble in the long run. Note carefully or photocopy the precise publication information for every source you use, and construct a working bibliography as you go. When using Web sources, be sure to include the URL and the date on which you accessed the information. When taking notes, always record page numbers, and put quotation marks around any words you're copying directly. Whenever possible, keep hard copies of all material you've used; this will allow you to return to it later, either to reread or to check that you've cited correctly.

## **For More Information....**

The points noted above are just a beginning. There are many guidebooks and style manuals that provide detailed practical advice on how to deal with graduate-level research, including how to integrate material from sources into your own writing. Spend some time investigating what's available in the writing section of a good academic bookstore, and invest in a book that will suit your needs. Your student advisor or one of your professors may be able to suggest books appropriate to your field. The tutors at the NSSR Writing Center (65 Fifth Ave., room 376A) can also help you master the techniques that will enable you to develop your own voice and use sources to produce original, correctly documented scholarly contributions of your own.

## SLIPPING FROM PARAPHRASE TO PLAGIARISM

Sometimes students begin by making a sincere effort to paraphrase information from their sources, but as they continue to write, they take first a few words, then more, directly from the source texts, thus slipping – in many cases inadvertently – into plagiarism. The first excerpt below is from the website [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org). (This type of website is hardly an ideal source for a graduate essay; this one is poorly written, and contains a spelling error. Its partisan origin also suggests that it may be biased. You should be getting your information from books and journals which provide more complete and reliable information.)

1 After graduating from university, Marx moved to Bonn, hoping to become a  
2 professor. However *the reactionary policy of the government made Marx abandon*  
3 *the idea of an academic career*, after Ludwig Feuerbach had been deprived of his  
4 chair in 1832..... In the spring of 1847 Marx and Engels *joined the secret*  
5 *propaganda society called the Communist League*. Marx and Engels took a  
6 prominent part in the League's Second Congress (London, November 1847), *at*  
7,8 *whose request they drew up the Communist Manifesto*, which appeared in  
February 1848. *With outstanding clarity*, this work outlines a new world-  
conception based on materialism. *This document analyses the realm of social*  
life; *the theory of the class struggle*; the tasks of the Communists; and the  
revolutionary role of the proletariat – the creators of a new, communist society.

The following excerpt is from a student essay. Plagiarized passages are italicized.

1 *Forbidden to seek a university career by the reactionary government*, Marx moved  
2 into journalism... Marx and Engels later *joined a secret labor organization named*  
3 *the Communist League, at whose request they wrote the "Communist Manifesto" in*  
4 *1848. In this short pamphlet they developed what "was to be the most*  
5 *succinct expression of their views."*<sup>3</sup> *With outstanding clarity* (it was written for  
6 workers), *this document analyzes the economic development of capitalism,*  
7 *under the materialist theory of the class struggle*. It shows that capitalism, like  
8 other previous social systems, has its historical limitations, and therefore will  
9 have to be overthrown and replaced by a new "communist society." Such a  
10 revolution reserves a central "role for the proletariat."

The student's work begins with an acceptable (though slightly inaccurate) paraphrase (1). It fails, however, to cite the source; the student is thus already guilty of plagiarism. The paraphrase (2) then segues into words directly lifted from the source (3). A passage from another work is correctly documented with quotation marks and a note, but the remainder of the paragraph consists of phrases from the website, spliced together with other material – either the student's own, or taken from another source. Although some phrases like "the theory of the class struggle" are so commonplace that they would not ordinarily need to be cited, the constellation of borrowed phrases here is so dense that it constitutes plagiarism. The student encloses the last two phrases (one slightly misquoted) in quotation marks, but fails to provide a source note. According to the Modern Language Association guidelines, this, too, constitutes plagiarism.

Sometimes students believe that if they acknowledge a source correctly in some places, they have done enough. They then create a patchwork of paraphrase and copied material, containing some citations, but also other passages which **should** have been cited and enclosed in quotations. The excerpt below is from a book by Eduardo Cadava; the following excerpt is from a student essay. Plagiarized passages are italicized.

1 *Awakening in his dark room, Marcel finds himself in a photographic space.<sup>64</sup> What whirls before*  
2 *him in this dark space is not only the changing, unseen walls, the doors, the furniture, but also all*  
3 *the things, places, and years that remain written within his memory. Like a spectator in the dark*  
4 *projection hall of a cinema, he encounters a succession of images moving before him with a*  
5 *rapidity that, in bringing together the past and the present, prevents him from orienting himself*  
6 *in relation to either the image, the past, or the present. What is striking in the movement of the*  
7 *passage, however, is that Marcel's effort to orient himself is soon that of his body rather than of*  
8 *his mind. It is the memory of his body that works to discover where he is. Within the Proustian*  
9 *corpus it is the body that registers or records memories and impressions. An apparatus of*  
10 *memory, it finds itself, as Marcel says of the past, "encumbered with innumerable negatives"*  
11 *that, inscribed within it, remain undeveloped by the mind (2:1020 / 4:474). That cognition and*  
12 *perception are dependent upon the entirety of the corporeal sensorium means that memory and*  
13 *its negatives are irreducible to the operations of consciousness and therefore cannot be brought*  
14 *to light: to remember within the space of the remembering body is to remember without knowing*  
15 *anything. In other words, the body in Proust names a principle of articulation among writing,*  
16 *memory and materiality that does not belong to the domain of knowledge.*

1 *As he awakens, the narrator finds himself in a photographic space. What revolves around him in the*  
2 *dark space is not only the unseen walls and pieces of furniture but the ghostly images of things, places*  
3 *and years that remain written in his memory. This succession of images moves around him,*  
4 *preventing him from orienting himself in relation to the past or the present. As Eduardo Cadava*  
5 *has noted, for both Benjamin and Proust, memory is in the first place a memory of the body.*  
6 *"It is the memory of the body that works to discover where he is. Within the Proustian*  
7 *corpus it is the body that registers or records memories and impressions" (76).*  
8 *As Benjamin also notices, the body in Proust is a principle of articulation among writing,*  
9 *memory and materiality, and its operations, the entire corporeal sensorium, are irreducible to the*  
10 *operations of consciousness.*

The student essay begins by paraphrasing Cadava (1), and quickly moves to copying the passage almost word for word (2). A correctly acknowledged citation (3) then appears, followed by a passage composed almost entirely of phrases lifted from the same text, with slight rewording and reordering (6,4,5). Although the student may have thought that the one correct citation was adequate acknowledgment of the source, this is not the case. Even if there had been more of the student's own words here, this essay would be unacceptable. Your essays should be primarily your own work, not patchworks of paraphrase and quotation.

**If you are not sure when or how to cite your sources, begin to inform yourself now. Fogelman Library offers workshops on using RefWorks software for citations and bibliographies, and reference librarians will meet with students individually and answer questions submitted online (for information on these services, go to [library.newschool.edu](http://library.newschool.edu)). The tutors at the NSSR Writing Center (65 Fifth Ave., room 376A) will also be able to help you.**

