

Adapted from: <http://www.georgetown.edu/honor/plagiarism.html> by Michael Lippstreu and Zenzi M. Griffin.

What Is Plagiarism?

For our purposes, plagiarism is defined as the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another. Four simple conventions for when you must provide a reference are:

1. If you use someone else's ideas, you must cite the source.
2. If you use someone else's words, they must be presented in quotation marks, and you must cite the source.
3. If the way in which you are using the source is unclear, make it clear.
4. If you received specific help from someone in writing the paper, acknowledge it.

I thought I could use someone's words if I reference or cite the source.

You can, and this happens all the time in academia. It is necessary for building upon the works of others. The trouble comes when you start to use someone else's words all throughout your paper. Pretty soon your paper looks like nothing but a field of quotation marks with a few of your few sentences connecting them. This does not represent very much intellectual work on your part. You have assembled a paper rather than writing one.

This is not about cases in which someone sets out to deliberately plagiarize. This is about how you can get yourself into trouble by adopting the vocabulary, words, and phrases of an author, using them throughout your paper, and not thinking that you have to put quotation marks around each phrase or key word.

Consider the following passage from Heilbroner, Robert L. (1974). *An Inquiry into The Human Prospect*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. p. 37:

The race between food and mouths is perhaps the most dramatic and most highly publicized aspect of the population problem, but is not necessarily the most immediately threatening. For the torrent of human growth imposes intolerable social strains on the economically backward regions, as well as hideous costs on their individual citizens. Among these social strains the most frightening is that of urban disorganization. Rapidly increasing populations in the rural areas of technologically static societies create unemployable surpluses of manpower that stream into the cities in search of work. In the underdeveloped world generally, cities are therefore growing at rates that cause them to double in ten years--in some cases in as little as six years. In many such cities unemployment has already reached levels of 25 percent, and it will inevitably rise as the city populace swells. The cesspool of Calcutta thus becomes more and more the image of urban degradation toward which the dynamics of population growth are pushing the poorest lands.

There are a number of characteristic phrases here that say a lot in just a few words: "the race between food and mouths," "torrent of human growth," "urban disorganization," and "cesspool of Calcutta." If you use these phrases in your paper without indicating that Heilbroner wrote them, or just put one reference to Heilbroner at the end of the paper in the bibliography, you are committing plagiarism, even if you thought you were just trying to express your ideas better than you otherwise could.

For example, if you wrote something like this:

The cesspool of Calcutta is a good example of a city where urban disorganization is being threatened because of a rapidly increasing population. These cities are technologically static, economically backward, and impose intolerable social strains and hideous costs on their individual citizens.

and put no reference to Heilbroner, it would certainly be plagiarism. If you put one reference to Heilbroner in the bibliography, it would still be plagiarism, because your citation was too vague. You could write it this way:

The "cesspool of Calcutta" is a good example of a city where "urban disorganization" is being threatened because of a rapidly increasing population. These cities are "technologically static," "economically backward," and impose intolerable social strains and "hideous costs on their individual citizens."
(Heilbroner, 1974, p. 37)

You have lived up to the letter of the law--you have given the proper citation. But have you fulfilled your job as a writer? One could argue that the reader would be better off reading Heilbroner's original paragraph. All the "meat" in your paragraph is his. It depends on how this paragraph fits into the larger whole of what you are writing, of course, but this may be a case of not doing enough intellectual work yourself.

By the way, did you know that even using one of these small, characteristic phrases without quotation marks is considered plagiarism?

What should you do? Really think about what you are reading, outline an argument that reflects the conclusions you are drawing, and when you flesh out the argument, write mainly in your own words, adding quotations where they are necessary to acknowledge others' thoughts and to present evidence that helps your argument. Obviously if you are working at the last minute, you won't have time to do this.

What Is a Paraphrase, Anyway?

Paraphrase is stating someone else's ideas in your own words. And yes, you do have to cite sources, even for paraphrases.

When you are writing a paper, think about the reader and what questions he or she would ask. If you can imagine the reader saying: "what was the source of that idea?" then you should cite it, even if you rewrote it in your own words.

Let's paraphrase that Heilbroner passage.

Heilbroner (1974) argues that population problems manifest not only as hunger, but also as urban breakdown that arises from large population growth. Unemployed people pour into depressed cities such as Calcutta, stretching both the cities and the people to the breaking point as they fail to find work. As population growth continues at a rapid pace, such places will become the very image of third-world debasement.

This passage must include a citation of Heilbroner. It has captured all of the main ideas in his paragraph. Although the author of the paraphrased passage has used "their own" words, for example, substituting the idea of "pouring" into a city rather than "streaming" into it, and substituting the word "debasement" for "degradation," the argument still tracks along with

Heilbroner's. It is the same argument. The fact that some words were changed and others were eliminated does not mean that this is original work.

In general, that example of a paraphrased passage could be dangerous. As long as you cite the source, it is technically not plagiarism. However, it is poor work because it appears that the author just used a thesaurus to re-write the argument. Thus, it may not be plagiarism technically, but it should not receive a good grade. Why? Because in a research paper you should be discussing other work as part of building your own argument. This will require summarizing the theories and results of other people, and paraphrasing passages usually will just make it more difficult to figure out what your point is.

The main idea about plagiarism is that YOU are expected to do YOUR OWN work. If you don't use proper citation, then you are attempting to pass off someone else's work as your own.

Guidelines for Citing Papers

8.11 Plagiarism

Psychologists do not present portions of another's work or data as their own, even if the other work or data source is cited occasionally. -Ethics Code of the American Psychological Association (effective June 1, 2003)

Students are expected to distinguish their own ideas and observations from those that come from readings, discussions, or lectures. When possible this should be done by citing the source of the idea, as in "(e.g., Chomsky, 1959)." Claiming the **ideas** of another as ones own is plagiarism. It does not matter whether the ideas from the source are expressed in the source's original words or in a paraphrase. If you have any questions, please ask.

Citations

- When you make an assertion, cite the source that provides the evidence for the assertion or makes the original assertion.
- If possible, read and cite a primary source (original research report or theoretical paper):
"Speakers take about one second to begin naming an object presented in isolation (e.g. Snodgrass & Yuditsky, 1996)."
- If you can't read the primary source, cite a review article,
"Speakers seem to outline a proposition- or clause-sized message before they begin sequentially preparing the words they will utter (see Bock & Levelt, 1994, for review)."
- or another secondary source.
"Interpreting results is considered a professional activity (Spiegel & Keith-Spiegel, 1970; as cited by Fine & Kurdek, 1993)."
- In other words, don't trust anyone but yourself to interpret an article. If you are going to reference it, you (or one of your co-authors) should have read the relevant section of the text.
- Although it is good to make sure that you read and cite recent articles to make sure that your topic is up-to-date, it is good practice to try to read and attribute results to the first researcher to find an effect or propose an idea. This can mean going far back in the literature. For example, thousands of studies of the Stroop Effect have been published and could be examples of the phenomenon, but it is good to cite the original paper by Stroop (1935) if you can (i.e., if you have read it).
- In general, it is not worth quoting a text unless the author expresses something in an extraordinary way or makes a claim that is so surprising that the reader might not believe it without seeing it. If you have more than one quote in a student paper, you are probably overdoing it.

Reference Section

- ALL references cited in the text of a paper MUST be listed in the reference list (in APA format - which includes the author(s), year, title, journal or book, volume, page numbers, and for books, the publisher).
- The ONLY references in the reference list are those that are referenced in the text. It doesn't matter if you read 30 other articles - if you didn't reference them in any way, they don't belong in the reference list.
- It is the author's responsibility to ensure that the references are complete and ACCURATE; it is therefore irresponsible not to double-check all of your references.