

HOW TO AVOID PLAGIARISM WHEN DOCUMENTING



What Is Plagiarism, and Is It Easy to Do?

“Plagiarism” is using someone else’s words, ideas, or information in your own writing without acknowledging the source. Committing plagiarism is easy because many people are uninformed about plagiarism. Unfortunately, they believe that it is acceptable to use the words from a source without quotation marks as long as they do the following:

- Replace some of the words.
- Change the order.
- Use only part of a sentence.
- Cite the source at the end of the sentence or paragraph.

These are all false. Either you must use quotation marks, or you should be “paraphrasing” (i.e. writing the information in your own words). To do so, you must change the distinctive words and phrase structure, and if the information is the author’s idea rather than common knowledge, you must also cite the author’s name in your text even if you have paraphrased the author’s idea.

What is Documentation, and When Do I Do It?

“Documentation” is a way to refer to the source from which you got your information. The following are some principles to use when documenting:

- When you are writing a paper, you should document all information that is not generally known or information that was new to you. This includes information that you have rewritten in your own words (paraphrased) as well as direct quotations.
- If you are not sure if you should document something, then do document since it is wiser to over-document than to under-document.
- For a research paper, you should probably document at least once per paragraph.

How Do I Document and Avoid Plagiarism?

1. Start paraphrasing early; paraphrase your notes as you do research.
2. Do not try to re-write the information in exactly the same order and form but with different words. Finding synonyms can be difficult. When you paraphrase, lift your eyes from the source and try to explain the information to yourself in your own words. Avoid focusing on one sentence but rather focus on an entire concept. Then, write down your explanation, but double check that you are not quoting.
3. Do not paraphrase parts that are written well and sound good. When you paraphrase, preserve the author's best phrases in quotation marks to indicate that they are the author's, and incorporate these quoted phrases with your own words.
4. Do not use distinctive words or phrase structures from the author's text. Distinctive words are most of the words. You would know that you used the author's distinctive phrase structure s if your sentence sounds like his or her sentence but with different words. Avoid simply replacing the author's words with synonyms and following the same sentence structure. The following are words you are typically allowed to use:
 - function words such as prepositions (in, at, on, etc.), articles (a, an, the), conjunctions (and, but, or, yet, etc.), and pronouns (this, that, it, he, she, etc.)
 - terms from the discipline
 - proper names of people, places, and events
 - numbers such as sizes, populations, and statistics