



AN INTRODUCTION TO PLAGIARISM

Timothy Peters, Director
Off-Campus Library Services
Central Michigan University

WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Plagiarism is the act of presenting the work of another as your own. If you use the work of someone else and either knowingly or inadvertently claim it as your own creation you are committing an act of plagiarism.



WHAT FORMS CAN PLAGIARISM TAKE?

- Word-for-word copying of another's work without properly acknowledging the source of the information
- Paraphrasing the work of another without acknowledgement
- Failing to properly cite your source, even if that failure is inadvertent
- Attributing information to a source from which it did not come
- Submitting material created by another under your name
- Submitting material created by yourself and others but claiming the work entirely as your own



WHY STUDENTS PLAGIARIZE

- Not enough time to complete the assignment (procrastination, poor time management skills, or a busy schedule outside of school can all contribute to this)
- Laziness
- Lack of fundamental research skills (be aware that some plagiarism is inadvertent)
- Careless research methods (e.g. failing to document sources used during the research process)
- A fear that one's own academic abilities are not adequate, leading one to seek a superior product



WHY STUDENTS PLAGIARIZE

- Perceived pressure from external forces (parents, friends, scholarship committees, etc.) to maintain high grades
- Cultural differences. In many non-Western societies, the idea of “owning” text or material is perplexing
- Because cheating is perceived as acceptable in today’s society, as a way to ‘get ahead’
- A perceived lack of punishment by the instructor or the institution
- Because it’s easy to do



WHY IS IT WRONG?

Plagiarism is a form of theft. According to United States copyright law, the legal copyright owner has the exclusive right to reproduce, distribute, display, perform, and make derivative copies of the work. Using the copyrighted material of another person without first obtaining permission to do so or without properly identifying your source is essentially stealing someone else's property.



HOW DOES CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY REGARD PLAGIARISM?

Plagiarism is considered a violation of CMU's Policy on Academic Integrity and alleged violations of this policy will be handled in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the Policy. See section 2.B. of the Policy at http://academicsenate.cmich.edu/NonCad/ACADEMIC_INTEGRITY_POLICY.pdf.



QUIZ TIME!

Determine whether or not the following are examples of plagiarism.



EXAMPLE #1

SOURCE USED:

The wind erosion problem of the southern Great Plains did not occur because farmers grew too much wheat, but because the drought prevented them from growing hardly any wheat at all from 1932 to 1940. During years of normal precipitation, the excessive root system of the wheat plants held the soil and offered excellent protection against wind erosion. In the droughty Thirties, however, the inadequate moisture supply prevented a suitable growth of ground cover in the early Spring “blow season” of February, March, and April. The drought then began a chain of events, the first of which was crop failure.

STUDENT PAPER:

"The wind erosion problem of the southern Great Plains did not occur because farmers grew too much wheat, but because the drought prevented them from growing hardly any wheat at all from 1932 to 1940" (Hurt, 1981, p. 29-30).

APA reference:

Hurt, R. D. (1981). *The dust bowl: An agricultural and social history*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.



ANSWER #1

No, it is not.

Since the quoted material is enclosed in quotation marks and because the source is cited correctly and completely, this is not an incident of plagiarism.



EXAMPLE #2

SOURCE USED:

The wind erosion problem of the southern Great Plains did not occur because farmers grew too much wheat, but because the drought prevented them from growing hardly any wheat at all from 1932 to 1940. During years of normal precipitation, the excessive root system of the wheat plants held the soil and offered excellent protection against wind erosion. In the droughty Thirties, however, the inadequate moisture supply prevented a suitable growth of ground cover in the early Spring “blow season” of February, March, and April. The drought then began a chain of events, the first of which was crop failure.

STUDENT PAPER:

The wind erosion problem of the southern Great Plains did not occur because farmers grew too much wheat, but because the drought prevented them from growing hardly any wheat at all from 1932 to 1940 (Hurt, 1981, p. 29-30).

APA reference:

Hurt, R. D. (1981). *The dust bowl: An agricultural and social history*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.



ANSWER #2

Yes, it is.

The text from the source is quoted verbatim but it is not enclosed in quotation marks. A direct quotation of an author's words must be enclosed in quotation marks.



EXAMPLE #3

SOURCE USED:

The wind erosion problem of the southern Great Plains did not occur because farmers grew too much wheat, but because the drought prevented them from growing hardly any wheat at all from 1932 to 1940. During years of normal precipitation, the excessive root system of the wheat plants held the soil and offered excellent protection against wind erosion. In the droughty Thirties, however, the inadequate moisture supply prevented a suitable growth of ground cover in the early Spring “blow season” of February, March, and April. The drought then began a chain of events, the first of which was crop failure.

STUDENT PAPER:

The wind erosion problem of the Great Plains occurred because the drought prevented farmers from growing hardly any wheat from 1932 to 1940. Normally, the excessive root system of the wheat plants held the soil and offered excellent protection against wind erosion, but in the Thirties, the inadequate moisture supply prevented a suitable growth of ground cover.

APA reference:

None



ANSWER #3

Yes, this is plagiarism.

Though the student has paraphrased the author's words, the ideas and facts used remain identical. As such, the author must be cited as the source of the information.



EXAMPLE #4

SOURCE USED:

The wind erosion problem of the southern Great Plains did not occur because farmers grew too much wheat, but because the drought prevented them from growing hardly any wheat at all from 1932 to 1940. During years of normal precipitation, the excessive root system of the wheat plants held the soil and offered excellent protection against wind erosion. In the droughty Thirties, however, the inadequate moisture supply prevented a suitable growth of ground cover in the early Spring “blow season” of February, March, and April. The drought then began a chain of events, the first of which was crop failure.

STUDENT PAPER:

During years of normal precipitation, the excessive root system of the wheat plant holds the soil in place and offers excellent protection against wind erosion. During the 1930s, however, drought prevented farmers from growing almost any wheat, thus preventing a suitable growth of necessary ground cover. This crop failure was the first in a chain of events that resulted in the Dust Bowl (Hurt, 1981, p. 29-30).

APA reference:

Hurt, R. D. (1981). *The dust bowl: An agricultural and social history*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.



ANSWER #4

No, this is not plagiarism.

The author's words and ideas have been paraphrased, but credit has been correctly given to the author.



EXAMPLE #5

In her paper, a student mentions that George Washington was the first President of the United States. Does this source of this fact need to be cited?



ANSWER #5

No.

Since this fact is common knowledge to all, citation is not necessary.



EXAMPLE #6

In your paper, you mention the fact that one of Washington's first concerns as President was paying off foreign and domestic debt as a way to reestablish the nation's credit. Do you need to cite your source if you use this fact?



ANSWER #6

Yes, you do.

This fact is very specific and cannot be considered common knowledge, so it must be cited. As such, it should be stated here that this information was paraphrased from the following source:

APA reference: Washington, George. In *Family encyclopedia of American history* (pp. 1206-1209). (1975). Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest Association.



TIPS ON AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

- Familiarize yourself with the basics of the research writing process, including the citing of sources
- Make note of all the sources you consult during the research process
- Remember that paraphrasing the ideas of another still requires proper citation
- Properly cite the sources you use in your paper
- Proofread the final version of your paper to ensure that all the sources you used are cited correctly
- If unsure whether to cite a source or how to cite it properly, ask your instructor



HELPFUL RESOURCES

CMU Writing Center:

http://www.chsbs.cmich.edu/writing_center/

The Online Writing Lab at Purdue University:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

Citing Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism (from The Duke University Libraries):

<http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/>

