



Avoiding Plagiarism in Academic Writing

I. What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the uncredited use of somebody else's words or ideas and is one of the most serious offenses any student can commit, even if the act is unintentional. Plagiarism can have severe consequences such as failing classes or even expulsion. To avoid plagiarism, students must follow certain rules in regard to proper citations. This handout provides a few basic rules for avoiding plagiarism by determining what needs to be cited and how to cite that information correctly.

What counts as plagiarism?

Plagiarism takes many forms. Some of the most common are:

- Buying, stealing, downloading, or borrowing a paper (from a person and/or online)
- Hiring someone to write the paper for you
- Copying large sections of text from a source without quotation marks and citation
- Using the words of your source too closely when paraphrasing with citation
- Attempting to make ideas of others appear as if they are your own
- Submitting your own work from previous classes without discussing it with your professor first

How can I avoid plagiarism?

The best way to avoid plagiarism is to give credit. This means crediting your sources for what they have said, written, emailed, drew, or implied. Whenever you use something that is not your original material, you must give credit; here is a brief list of some the most common types of things that need to be cited:

- Words and ideas from a book, article, movie, web page, lecture, letter, advertisement, song, TV show, or other forms of media
- Words and ideas from interviews you have conducted (face-to-face, by phone, email, or other methods)
- Diagrams, illustrations, charts, pictures, or other materials you have reprinted or adapted
- Any exact wording or unique phrases you have taken from anywhere other than your own mind



What doesn't need to be cited?

Obviously, not everything needs to be cited. You can use certain information without citing and not be guilty of plagiarism: this includes:

- Writing about your own experiences, insights, observations, and thoughts
- Your own results from experiments you have conducted
- Your own original artwork, photography, video, music, or other media
- Common knowledge (including folklore, common sense observations, urban legends, and extremely well-known historical events)
- Well-known and well-accepted facts known by the average member of the general population

What exactly is common knowledge?

Since common knowledge does not need to be cited, it is important to understand what constitutes “common knowledge”. You can regard something as common knowledge if you find the same information undocumented in at least five credible sources. Also, it might be common knowledge if you think the information you are presenting is something your readers will already know, or something that a person could easily find in general reference sources. If you are not sure if something is common knowledge, cite it. It is better to cite too much than to cite too little and be guilty of plagiarism.

Writing paraphrases and summaries:

Paraphrasing restates an idea in your own words, though not necessarily the entire text. Summarizing captures the main ideas more concisely as well as in your own words. Here are a few tips to help you:

- Give credit to your source somewhere in the paraphrase/summary. For example:
According to evolutionary biologist Dan Dennett...”
- Check your paraphrase or summary against the original text both for accuracy of information and to ensure that you have truly used your own words
- Put quotation marks around any unique phrases or words that you do not want to change from the original



Writing direct quotes:

A direct quotation takes the words from the original source and used them exactly as they appear with the addition of quotation marks and a citation. Here are a few tips:

- Keep the source author's name in the same sentence as the quote
- Mark the quote with quotation marks if it is a shorter quote or set it off from your text in a block quote if it is longer (depending on the format style being used, block quotes are determined by line or word count)
- Don't quote more material than is necessary. If you only need to quote a short phrase or sentence, do not quote the entire paragraph.

Writing about another's ideas:

Writing about the ideas of another person without plagiarizing can be difficult. Here are a few things to remember:

- Put the name of the idea's originator in the sentence or throughout the paragraph about the idea to give the original person credit
- Use citations to refer readers to the source material
- Be sure to use quotation marks around key phrases/words the idea's originator used to describe the idea

Some final tips:

- Proofread and cross-check your paper with your notes and sources to make sure that anything coming from an outside source is cited properly
- If you are unsure whether or not something needs to be cited, cite it. Better safe than sorry!
- If you have any questions about citation, ask your instructor well in advance of the due date so you have enough time to make adjustments to citations if needed.



II. Paraphrasing Skills

A paraphrase is...

- an explanation of particular ideas and information from a source
- written in your own words and sentence structures
- more specific than a summary

Paraphrasing is a valuable skill because...

- It is better than quoting information from an undistinguished passage
- It helps you control the temptation to quote too much
- The mental process required for successful paraphrasing helps you to grasp the meaning of the original.

How **NOT TO** paraphrase:

- change only a few words from the original source

Steps to Effective Paraphrasing:

1. Reread the original passage until you understand its full meaning.
2. Set the original aside, and write your paraphrase on a note card.
3. Check your version with the original to make sure that your paraphrase accurately expresses all the essential information in a new form.
4. Use quotation marks to ID any unique term or phraseology you have borrowed from the exact source.

Record the source (including the page) on your note card so that you can credit it easily if you decide to incorporate material into your paper.

III. Some Examples to Compare

Original passage:

In 1938, in a series of now-classic experiments, exposure to synthetic dyes derived from coal and belonging to a class of chemicals called aromatic amines was shown to cause bladder cancer in dogs. These results helped explain why bladder cancer had become so prevalent in dyestuffs workers. With the invention of mauve in 1854, synthetic dyes began replacing natural plant-based dyes in the coloring of cloth and leather. By the beginning of the twentieth century, bladder cancer rates among this group of workers had skyrocketed, and the dog experiments helped unravel this mystery.

-Sandra Steingraber, "Pesticides, Animals, and Humans," p. 976



Paraphrased Passages: Which of the following passages paraphrases the original passage most effectively? Why? Which have parts that are plagiarized?

(1)

Now-classic experiments in 1938 showed that when dogs were exposed to aromatic amines, chemicals used in synthetic dyes derived from coal, they developed bladder cancer. Similar cancers were prevalent among dyestuffs workers, and these experiments helped to explain why. Mauve, a synthetic dye, was invented in 1854, after which cloth and leather most of the natural plant-based dyes with synthetic dyes. By the early twentieth century, this group of workers had skyrocketing rates of bladder cancer, a mystery the dog experiments helped to unravel (Steingraber 976).

(2)

In 1938, several pathbreaking experiments showed that being exposed to synthetic dyes that are made from coal and belong to a type of chemicals called aromatic amines caused dogs to get bladder cancer. These results helped researchers identify why cancers of the bladder had become so common among textile workers who worked with dyes. With the development of mauve in 1854, synthetic dyes began to be used instead of dyes based on plants in the dyeing of leather and cloth. By the end of the nineteenth century, rates of bladder cancer among these workers had increased dramatically, and the experiments using dogs helped clear up this oddity (Steingraber 976)

(3)

Biologist Sandra Steingraber explains that pathbreaking experiments in 1938 demonstrated that dogs exposed to aromatic amines (chemical used in coal-derived synthetic dyes) developed cancers of the bladder that were similar to cancers common among dyers in the textile industry. After mauve, the first synthetic dye, was invented in 1854, leather and cloth manufacturers replaced most natural dyes made from plants with synthetic dyes; consequently, by the early 1900s textile workers had very high rates of bladder cancer. The experiments with dogs proved the connection (976).



IV. Patchwriting: Another Type of Plagiarism

Patchwriting Table*

Author: Kenneth T. Walsh

Title: “The 1960s: A Decade of Change for Women”

Periodical: *US News and World Report*

Date of Publication: March 12, 2010

Paragraph from Walsh’s article	Example of Patchwriting
<p>In the 1960s, deep cultural changes were altering the role of women in American society. More females than ever were entering the paid workforce, and this increased the dissatisfaction among women regarding huge gender disparities in pay and advancement and sexual harassment at the workplace. One of the most profound changes was happening in the bedroom. By the end of the Sixties, more than 80% of wives of childbearing age were using contraception after the federal government in 1960 approved a birth control pill. This freed many women from unwanted pregnancy and gave them many more choices, and freedom, in their personal lives.</p> <p>104 words</p>	<p>Many cultural changes were altering the role of women in America in the 1960s. More women were entering the paid workforce. They were <u>dissatisfied with sexual harassment at work and salary disparities</u>. But one of the most important changes was happening in the bedroom. [The federal government approved a birth control pill in 1960.] At the end of the Sixties, more than 80% of married women were using the pill. This freed them from unwanted pregnancy and gave them more freedom (Walsh).</p> <p>83 words</p> <p>The underlined text consists of words and phrases that are exact or near-exact copies from the original.</p> <p>The bracketed text is information from the original that has been moved from its original location or changed places in the sentence.</p> <p>The parenthetical attribution at the end is an attempt at attribution, but in the context of an essay would not acknowledge the extent to which the information in the students’ writing is copied from the original.</p>

*Adapted from a handout by Dr. Robin Reid



Correct Summary	Correct Paraphrase
<p>In an article written for <i>US News and World Report</i> in 2010, Kenneth T. Walsh argues that the changes in the United States during the 1960s resulted in greater opportunities and freedom for women. He discusses both changes in the workplace, where more women were active, and the legalization of the birth control pill.</p> <p>50 words</p> <p>A summary includes only the main ideas of the original text in your own words. It is necessary to attribute summarized ideas to the original source. Summaries are significantly shorter than the original and take a broad overview of the source material.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The source, author, and date of publication are identified at the start of the summary.2. Summary of the main argument of the original paragraph in the writer's own words. Note that in the original, the argument comes at the end of the paragraph.3. The word choices, sentence structure, and organization of the paragraph are different from the original.	<p>Kenneth T. Walsh, in "The 1960s: A Decade of Change for Women," argues that women began to have more opportunity for work and more personal freedom during the 1960s because of government approval of birth control.</p> <p>Paraphrasing involves putting information from a passage into your own words. A paraphrase must also be attributed to the original source. The word choices, sentence structure, and organization of the paragraph are different from the original.</p>



V. Activity: Paraphrase and Cite This Passage in MLA or APA Format

The following is a short passage for you to paraphrase. For this activity

- Read, and then reread the passage, making sure that you understand its full meaning.
- Choose a partner to explain the main point of this passage in your own words.
- Setting this text aside, paraphrase its content as best you can, being sure to cite it correctly.
- Use quotation marks to ID any unique terms or phrases you have borrowed from the exact source.

Soon after the republic was formed, the toga became the symbol of Roman citizenship. Different styles of togas indicated a male's place in society. For example, a young boy would wear a white toga with a narrow purple band along the border. When his family decided he was ready for adult responsibilities, he would don a pure white toga. On the day, usually when he was about sixteen, his family would take him to the Forum, where he would register as a full citizen. For the rest of his life, he would wear a toga at the theatre, in court, for religious ceremonies, and on any formal occasion. At his funeral his body would be wrapped in a toga to mark him, even in death, as a Roman citizen.

Source:

Article Title: Social Pecking Order in the Roman World

Author: Dr. Valerie Hope

Year: 1992



VI. Additional Passages for Paraphrasing Practice

Religious groups, such as Catholics or lesser Protestant sects, have at one time or another borne the yoke of discrimination. Around the world and in the United States, persecution of religious minorities considerably decreased in the twentieth century—the exception being the conflict between Protestant and Catholic factions in Northern Ireland and between Hindu and Muslim groups in India.

Source:

Chapter title: The Dialectic of Liberty

Author: David Womersley

Year: 2006

Reagan's role in the 1988 election was of incalculable value to G. H. Bush. For one thing, Bush was basking in the glow of Reagan's successes, taking credit for being part of the team that was seen by many as having restored America's morale, rebuilt its defenses, tamed inflation, and brought down interest rates. Reagan's failures and embarrassments seemed to fade in people's memories as the year went on, and as he became a nostalgic figure about to leave the scene. The other way that Reagan helped was in giving his all-out support to Bush. The Reagan White House cooperated with the Bush campaign to an unprecedented extent—in having the President sign or veto bills deemed helpful to Bush, in making appointments, in putting off unpleasant business until after the election.

Source:

Chapter Title: George H.W. Bush: Impact and Legacy

Author: Stephen Kott

Year: 2017