

Avoiding Unintentional Plagiarism

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is incorporating another author's ideas or words into your paper without giving that author proper credit. Plagiarism can include the following:

- ✗ Using another author's phrase, sentence, or paragraph without the proper citation
- ✗ Paraphrasing another text without using proper citation
- ✗ Purchasing or downloading an essay from the internet and using it as your own
- ✗ Turning in an essay written by a friend and presenting it as your own
- ✗ Turning in the same essay for two different classes without permission from both teachers

How can you avoid plagiarism?

Follow these guidelines:

- ✗ Whenever you directly quote an author—using that author's *exact* wording, phrasing, and punctuation—that quotation must be contained within quotation marks and cited properly according to whichever stylebook your discipline requires (MLA, APA, Turabian, etc.).
- ✗ Paraphrasing involves summarizing another author's words or ideas without using direct quotations. Whenever you paraphrase another person's ideas, that paraphrase does not need to be contained within quotation marks, but you do need to provide a citation at the end of the sentence.
- ✗ NEVER turn in an essay that you did not write yourself.
- ✗ Generally, you should never turn in an essay for two different classes. If you are retaking a class and are given the same assignments, you should still re-write your essay. However, if you feel that you should be allowed to turn in an essay that you have written for another class, you need permission from every teacher who has ever graded that essay. If any of those teachers does not give you permission, and you turn in the essay anyway, you have plagiarized.

When are citations unneeded?

If you are presenting ideas or words that are not your own, it is always best to cite them. However, on occasion, a citation is unnecessary.

- ✗ If you are discussing research that you have conducted yourself, or you are presenting your own ideas, you do not need to cite your own work. However, if you conducted that research with the help of someone else, or if your own ideas were influenced by another author, then those other people deserve credit, as well.
- ✗ When information is common knowledge, it does not need to be cited. This generally refers to historical events. For example, if you mention that the American Revolution began in 1776, you do not need to cite that, as there are literally thousands of sources that contain that piece of information.

For more information about plagiarism, please see pages 519-526 in *The Writer's Handbook*.

WHEN IN DOUBT, CITE! And, of course, come by the writing center if you have any questions!