

Plagiarism & Paraphrasing



1. Overview and Contradictions

Research-based writing in American institutions, both educational and corporate, is filled with rules that writers, particularly beginners, aren't aware of or don't know how to follow. Many of these rules have to do with research and proper citation. Gaining a familiarity of these rules, however, is critically important, as inadvertent mistakes can lead to charges of **plagiarism**, which is the uncredited use (both intentional and unintentional) of somebody else's words or ideas.

While some cultures may not insist so heavily on documenting sources of words, ideas, images, sounds, etc., American culture does. A charge of plagiarism can have severe consequences, including expulsion from a university or loss of a job, not to mention a writer's loss of credibility and professional standing. This resource, which does not reflect any official university policy, is designed to help you develop strategies for knowing how to avoid accidental plagiarism. For instructors seeking a key statement on definitions and avoidance on plagiarism, see [Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices](#).

(Purdue University students will want to make sure that they are familiar with [Purdue's official academic dishonesty policy](#) as well as any additional policies that their instructors have implemented.)

Intellectual Challenges in American Academic Writing

There are some intellectual challenges that all students are faced with when writing. Sometimes these challenges can almost seem like contradictions, particularly when addressing them within a single paper. For example, American teachers often instruct students to:

- Develop a topic based on what has already been said and written **but** write something new and original
- Rely on opinions of experts and authorities on a topic **but** improve upon and/or disagree with those same opinions
- Give credit to researchers who have come before you **but** make your own significant contribution
- Improve your English or fit into a discourse community by building upon what you hear and read **but** use your own words and your own voice

2. Is It Plagiarism Yet?

There are some actions that can almost unquestionably be labeled plagiarism. Some of these include **buying, stealing, or borrowing a paper** (including, of course, copying an entire paper or article from the Web); **hiring someone to write your paper** for you; and **copying large sections of text** from a source without quotation marks or proper citation.

But then there are actions that are usually in more of a gray area. Some of these include using the words of a source too closely when paraphrasing (where quotation marks should have been used) or building on someone's ideas without citing their spoken or written work. Sometimes teachers suspecting students of plagiarism will consider the students' intent, and whether it appeared the student was deliberately trying to make ideas of others appear to be his or her own.

However, other teachers and administrators may not distinguish between deliberate and accidental plagiarism. So let's look at some strategies for avoiding even suspicion of plagiarism in the first place

When Do We Give Credit?

The key to avoiding plagiarism is to make sure you give credit where it is due. This may be credit for something somebody said, wrote, emailed, drew, or implied. Many professional organizations, including the Modern Language Association and the American Psychological Association, have lengthy guidelines for citing sources. However, students are often so busy trying to learn the rules of MLA format and style or APA format and style that they sometimes forget exactly what needs to be credited. Here, then, is **a brief list of what needs to be credited or documented**:

- Words or ideas presented in a magazine, book, newspaper, song, TV program, movie, Web page, computer program, letter, advertisement, or any other medium
- Information you gain through interviewing or conversing with another person, face to face, over the phone, or in writing
- When you copy the exact words or a unique phrase
- When you reprint any diagrams, illustrations, charts, pictures, or other visual materials
- When you reuse or repost any electronically-available media, including images, audio, video, or other media

Bottom line, document any words, ideas, or other productions that originate somewhere outside of you.

There are, of course, certain things that do not need documentation or credit, including:

- Writing your own lived experiences, your own observations and insights, your own thoughts, and your own conclusions about a subject

- When you are writing up your own results obtained through lab or field experiments
- When you use your own artwork, digital photographs, video, audio, etc.
- When you are using "common knowledge," things like folklore, common sense observations, myths, urban legends, and historical events (but **not** historical documents)
- When you are using generally-accepted facts, e.g., pollution is bad for the environment, including facts that are accepted within particular discourse communities, e.g., in the field of composition studies, "writing is a process" is a generally-accepted fact.

Deciding if Something is "Common Knowledge"

Generally speaking, you can regard something as common knowledge if you find the same information undocumented in at least five credible sources. Additionally, it might be common knowledge if you think the information you're presenting is something your readers will already know, or something that a person could easily find in general reference sources. But when in doubt, cite; if the citation turns out to be unnecessary, your teacher or editor will tell you.

3. Safe Practices

Most students, of course, don't intend to plagiarize. In fact, most realize that citing sources actually builds their credibility for an audience and even helps writers to better grasp information relevant to a topic or course of study. Mistakes in citation and crediting can still happen, so here are certain practices that can help you not only avoid plagiarism, but even improve the efficiency and organization of your research and writing.

Best Practices for Research and Drafting

Reading and Note-Taking

- In your notes, always mark someone else's words with a big **Q**, for quote, or use big quotation marks
- Indicate in your notes which ideas are taken from sources with a big **S**, and which are your own insights (**ME**)
- When information comes from sources, record relevant documentation in your notes (book and article titles; URLs on the Web)

Interviewing and Conversing

- Take lots of thorough notes; if you have any of your own thoughts as you're interviewing, mark them clearly
- If your subject will allow you to record the conversation or interview (and you have proper clearance to do so through an Institutional Review Board, or IRB),

place your recording device in an optimal location between you and the speaker so you can hear clearly when you review the recordings. Test your equipment, and bring plenty of backup batteries and media.

- If you're interviewing via email, retain copies of the interview subject's emails as well as the ones you send in reply
- Make any additional, clarifying notes immediately after the interview has concluded

Writing Paraphrases or Summaries

- Use a statement that credits the source somewhere in the paraphrase or summary, e.g., According to Jonathan Kozol,
- If you're having trouble summarizing, try writing your paraphrase or summary of a text without looking at the original, relying only on your memory and notes
- Check your paraphrase or summary against the original text; correct any errors in content accuracy, and be sure to use quotation marks to set off any exact phrases from the original text
- Check your paraphrase or summary against sentence and paragraph structure, as copying those is also considered plagiarism.
- Put quotation marks around any unique words or phrases that you cannot or do not want to change, e.g., "savage inequalities" exist throughout our educational system (Kozol).

Writing Direct Quotations

- Keep the source author's name in the same sentence as the quote
- Mark the quote with quotation marks, or set it off from your text in its own block, per the style guide your paper follows
- Quote no more material than is necessary; if a short phrase from a source will suffice, don't quote an entire paragraph
- To shorten quotes by removing extra information, use ellipsis points (...) to indicate omitted text, keeping in mind that:
 - MLA style requires ellipsis points to appear in brackets, e.g., [...].
 - three ellipsis points indicates an in-sentence ellipsis, and four points for an ellipsis between two sentences
- To give context to a quote or otherwise add wording to it, place added words in brackets, []; be careful not to editorialize or make any additions that skew the original meaning of the quote—do that in your main text, e.g.,
 - **OK:** Kozol claims there are "savage inequalities" in our educational system, which is obvious.
 - **WRONG:** Kozol claims there are "[obvious] savage inequalities" in our educational system.
- Use quotes that will have the most rhetorical, argumentative impact in your paper; too many direct quotes from sources may weaken your credibility, as though you have nothing to say yourself, and will certainly interfere with your style

Writing About Another's Ideas

- Note the name of the idea's originator in the sentence or throughout a paragraph about the idea
- Use parenthetical citations, footnotes, or endnotes to refer readers to additional sources about the idea, as necessary
- Be sure to use quotation marks around key phrases or words that the idea's originator used to describe the idea

Maintaining Drafts of Your Paper

Sometimes innocent, hard-working students are accused of plagiarism because a dishonest student steals their work. This can happen in all kinds of ways, from a roommate copying files off of your computer, to someone finding files on a disk or pen drive left in a computer lab. Here are some practices to keep your own intellectual property safe:

- Do not save your paper in the same file over and over again; use a numbering system and the Save As... function. E.g., you might have research_paper001.doc, research_paper002.doc, research_paper003.doc as you progress. Do the same thing for any HTML files you're writing for the Web. Having multiple draft versions may help prove that the work is yours (assuming you are being ethical in how you cite ideas in your work!).
- Maintain copies of your drafts in numerous media, and different secure locations when possible; don't just rely on your hard drive or pen drive.
- Password-protect your computer; if you have to leave a computer lab for a quick bathroom break, hold down the Windows key and L to lock your computer without logging out.
- Password-protect your files; this is possible in all sorts of programs, from Adobe Acrobat to Microsoft word (just be sure not to forget the password!)

Revising, Proofreading, and Finalizing Your Paper

- Proofread and cross-check with your notes and sources to make sure that anything coming from an outside source is acknowledged in some combination of the following ways:
 - In-text citation, otherwise known as parenthetical citation
 - Footnotes or endnotes
 - Bibliography, References, or Works Cited pages
 - Quotation marks around short quotes; longer quotes set off by themselves, as prescribed by a research and citation style guide
 - Indirect quotations: citing a source that cites another source
- If you have any questions about citation, ask your instructor **well in advance** of your paper's due date, so if you have to make any adjustments to your citations, you have the time to do them well

4. Safe Practices: An Exercise

Read over each the following passages, and respond on your own or as a class as to whether or not it uses citations accurately. If it doesn't, what would you do to improve the passage so its properly cited?

1. Last summer, my family and I traveled to Chicago, which was quite different from the rural area I grew up in. We saw the dinosaur Sue at the Field Museum, and ate pizza at Gino's East.

2. Americans want to create a more perfect union; they also want to establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for everybody.

3. I find it ridiculous that 57% of high school students think their teachers assign too much homework.

Numbers 4, 5, and 6 all refer to the following passage from Martin Luther King's "Letter from the Birmingham Jail":

You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.

4. Martin Luther King was certain that nobody would want to be contented with a surfacy type of social analysis that concerns itself only with effects and doesn't deal with root causes.

5. Martin Luther King wrote that the city of Birmingham's "white power structure" left African-Americans there "no alternative" but to demonstrate ("Letter from the Birmingham Jail" para. 5).

6. In "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," King writes to fellow clergy saying that although they "deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham, your statement fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations."

7. My friend Kara told me that she loves living so close to the ocean.

8. Americans are guaranteed the right to freely gather for peaceful meetings.



Paraphrase: Write it in Your Own Words

Brought to you by the Purdue University Online Writing Lab at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Learn to borrow from a source without plagiarizing. For more information on paraphrasing, as well as other ways to integrate sources into your paper, see the Purdue OWL handout Quoting Paraphrasing, and Summarizing at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_quotpsum.html. For more information about writing research papers, see our workshop on this subject at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/index.html>. Purdue students will want to make sure that they are familiar with Purdue's official academic dishonesty policy (<http://www.purdue.edu/odoss/administration/integrity.ht>

m) as well as any additional policies that their instructor has implemented. Another good resource for understanding plagiarism is the WPA Statement on Plagiarism (<http://www.ilstu.edu/~ddhesse/wpa/positions/WPAplagiarism.pdf>).

A paraphrase is...

- your own rendition of essential information and ideas expressed by someone else, presented in a new form.
- one legitimate way (when accompanied by accurate documentation) to borrow from a source.
- a more detailed restatement than a summary, which focuses concisely on a single main idea.

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 full meaning of the

original.

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6 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. Jot down a few words below your paraphrase to remind you later how you envision using this material. At the top of the note card, write a key word or phrase to indicate the subject of your paraphrase.

4. Check your rendition with the original to make sure that your version accurately expresses all the essential information in a new form.
5. Use quotation marks to identify any unique term or phraseology you have borrowed exactly from the source.
6. Record the source (including the page) on your note card so that you can credit it easily if you decide to incorporate the material into your paper.

Some examples to compare

The original passage:

Students frequently overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the final [research] paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes. Lester, James D. Writing Research Papers. 2nd ed. (1976): 46-47.

A legitimate paraphrase:

In research papers students often quote excessively, failing to keep quoted material down to a desirable level. Since the problem usually originates during note taking, it is essential to minimize the material recorded verbatim (Lester 46-47).

An acceptable summary:

Students should take just a few notes in direct quotation from sources to help minimize the amount of quoted material in a research paper (Lester 46-47).

A plagiarized version:

Students often use too many direct quotations when they take notes, resulting in too many of them in the final research paper. In fact, probably only about 10% of the final copy should consist of directly quoted material. So it is important to limit the amount of source material copied while taking notes.

After reviewing this handout, try an exercise on paraphrasing at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/research/r_paraphrEX1.html. □□

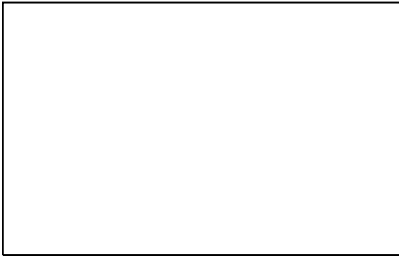
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Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing

Brought to you by the Purdue University Online Writing Lab at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Also, see our handout on paraphrasing at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_paraphr.html.

This handout is intended to help you become more comfortable with the uses of and distinctions among quotations, paraphrases, and summaries. The first part of the handout compares and contrasts the terms, while the second part offers a short excerpt that you can use to practice these skills.

What are the differences among quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing?

These three ways of incorporating other writers' work into your own writing differ according to the closeness of your writing to the source writing.

- **Quotations** must be identical to the original, using a narrow segment of the source. They must match the source document word for word and must be attributed to the original author.
- **Paraphrasing** involves putting a passage from source material into your own words. A paraphrase must also be attributed to the original source. Paraphrased material is usually shorter than the original passage, taking a somewhat broader segment of the source and condensing it slightly.
- **Summarizing** involves putting the main idea(s) into your own words, including only the main point(s). Once again, 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.

Why use quotations, paraphrases, and summaries?

Quotations, paraphrases, and summaries serve many purposes. You might use them to . . .

- provide support for claims or add credibility to your writing
- refer to work that leads up to the work you are now doing
- give examples of several points of view on a subject
- call attention to a position that you wish to agree or disagree with
- highlight a particularly striking phrase, sentence, or passage by quoting the original
- distance yourself from the original by quoting it in order to cue readers that the words are not your own
- expand the breadth or depth of your writing

Writers frequently intertwine summaries, paraphrases, and quotations. As part of a summary of an article, a chapter, or a book, a writer might include paraphrases of various key points blended with quotations of striking or suggestive phrases as in the following example:

In his famous and influential work *On the Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud argues that dreams are the "royal road to the unconscious" (page), expressing in coded imagery the dreamer's unfulfilled wishes through a process known as the "dream work" (page). According to Freud, actual but unacceptable desires are censored internally and subjected to coding through layers of condensation and displacement before emerging in a kind of rebus puzzle in the dream itself (pages).

How to use quotations, paraphrases, and summaries

Practice summarizing the following essay, using paraphrases and quotations as you go. It might be helpful to follow these steps:

- Read the entire text, noting the key points and main ideas.
- Summarize in your own words what the single main idea of the essay is.
- Paraphrase important supporting points that come up in the essay.
- Consider any words, phrases, or brief passages that you believe should be quoted directly.

There are several ways to integrate quotations into your text. Often, a short quotation works well when integrated into a sentence. Longer quotations can stand alone. Remember that quoting should be done only sparingly; be sure that you have a good reason to include a direct quotation when you decide to do so. You'll find guidelines for citing sources and punctuating citations at our documentation guide pages. We have one guide for the format recommended by the Modern Language Association (MLA) for papers in the humanities (at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html) and another for the format recommended by the American Psychological Association (APA) for papers in the social sciences (at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_apa.html).

Sample essay for summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting

So That Nobody Has To Go To School If They Don't Want To

by Roger Sipher

A decline in standardized test scores is but the most recent indicator that American education is in trouble.

One reason for the crisis is that present mandatory-attendance laws force many to attend school who have no wish to be there. Such children have little desire to learn and are so antagonistic to school that neither they nor more highly motivated students receive the quality education that is the birthright of every American.

The solution to this problem is simple: Abolish compulsory-attendance laws and allow only those who are committed to getting an education to attend.

This will not end public education. Contrary to conventional belief, legislators enacted compulsory-attendance laws to legalize what already existed. William Landes and Lewis Solomon, economists, found little evidence that mandatory-attendance laws increased the number of children in school. They found, too, that school systems have never effectively enforced such laws, usually because of the expense involved.

There is no contradiction between the assertion that compulsory attendance has had little effect on the number of children attending school and the argument that repeal would be a positive step toward improving education. Most parents want a high school education for their children. Unfortunately, compulsory attendance hampers the ability of public school officials to enforce legitimate educational and disciplinary policies and thereby make the education a good one.

Private schools have no such problem. They can fail or dismiss students, knowing such students can attend public school. Without compulsory attendance, public schools would be freer to oust students whose academic or personal behavior undermines the educational mission of the institution.

Has not the noble experiment of a formal education for everyone failed? While we pay homage to the homily, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink," we have pretended it is not true in education.

Ask high school teachers if recalcitrant students learn anything of value. Ask teachers if these students do any homework. Quite the contrary, these students know they will be passed from grade to grade until they are old enough to quit or until, as is more likely, they receive a high school diploma. At the point when students could legally quit, most choose to remain since they know they are likely to be allowed to graduate whether they do acceptable work or not.

Abolition of archaic attendance laws would produce enormous dividends.

First, it would alert everyone that school is a serious place where one goes to learn. Schools are neither day-care centers nor indoor street corners. Young people who resist learning should stay away; indeed, an end to compulsory schooling would require them to stay away.

Second, students opposed to learning would not be able to pollute the educational atmosphere for those who want to learn. Teachers could stop policing recalcitrant students and start educating.

Third, grades would show what they are supposed to: how well a student is learning. Parents could again read report cards and know if their children were making progress.

Fourth, public esteem for schools would increase. People would stop regarding them as way stations for adolescents and start thinking of them as institutions for educating America's youth.

Fifth, elementary schools would change because students would find out early they had better learn something or risk flunking out later. Elementary teachers would no longer have to pass their failures on to junior high and high school.

Sixth, the cost of enforcing compulsory education would be eliminated. Despite enforcement efforts, nearly 15 percent of the school-age children in our largest cities are almost permanently absent from school.

Communities could use these savings to support institutions to deal with young people not in school. If, in the long run, these institutions prove more costly, at least we would not confuse their mission with that of schools.

Schools should be for education. At present, they are only tangentially so. They have attempted to serve an all-encompassing social function, trying to be all things to all people. In the process they have failed miserably at what they were originally formed to accomplish.

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