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How to Avoid Plagiarism: The Scourge of the Academe

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Introduction

The convergence of economic, technological, and social change has propelled large-scale transformations in both society and academics. Consequently, academic institutions are implementing innovative instruction methods, teaching new ways of thinking, and confronting formerly insurmountable challenges, collectively imposing pressure on school administrators, educators, researchers, and students. In particular, students are faced with the challenge of researching and writing numerous required essays while ensuring that these submissions are adequately written and researched to meet the stringent criteria imposed by instructors. This is the primary reason many students resort to plagiarism. Unfortunately, the abundance of information available on the Internet, specifically, ready-made essays and papers, tempts students to cut corners and strategically "repurpose" information. However, students do not understand, perhaps because they have not been adequately informed, that plagiarism is a blatant neglect of their academic responsibilities and is a risky activity that could affect their future. (Galloway, Kerstetter, & Mazur, 2007).

The first step in addressing plagiarism is educating students about its specifics and its consequences. Understanding plagiarism can help students avoid it. The word 'plagiarism' is derived from the Latin words "plagiare," meaning "to steal," and "plagiarius," meaning "an abductor." In concept, the following describes what constitutes plagiarism: "The expropriation of another author's text, and the presentation of it as one's own, constitute plagiarism and is a serious violation of the ethics of scholarship" (Histology News Network, 2007, para. 1).

In other words, plagiarism is committed by citing an already documented idea as your own, or repurposing text that has been written by someone else. It is also perpetrated by paraphrasing, quoting, summarizing, or improperly citing. More often than not, students commit plagiarism unintentionally because they do not fully understand how to cite their sources. That is why it is important to teach students how to appropriately document their research early in their academic career (Histology News Network, 2007).

How is Plagiarism Committed?

Plagiarism is more than borrowing another's ideas without due credit, or copying the work of another person does not accurately depict the nature of the transgression. The following are some methods by which plagiarism can be committed:

- Failing to cite sources (either inaccurately or not at all);
- Committing non-attribution by not identifying the source of cited information with an introductory or signal phrase;
- Misrepresenting the true meaning of the original source when paraphrasing;
- Failing to use quotation marks around material written verbatim from a source;
- Misusing the paraphrase technique by using words and/or sentence structures that too closely match the original source (Galloway, Kerstetter, & Mazur, 2007).

Plagiarism is fundamentally wrong because it is a form of cheating and stealing. In the academic realm, it is a form of academic dishonesty. Original ideas and all forms of expression, whenever recorded in some meaningful way, are considered intellectual property. Therefore, just like original inventions, they are protected by copyright laws. Using ideas without citing the sources, verbatim or not, or misrepresenting the true meaning of a passage in rephrasing, is a serious academic offense. Plagiarism undermines academic integrity and defeats the very purpose of the pursuit of truth and knowledge in an academic setting.

Types of Plagiarism

In addition to understanding the nature of committing plagiarism, it is also important to identify the different types of plagiarism. A lack of understanding of the law does not justify committing the crime. According to Plagiarism (2008), the following are the different types of the act.

Sources Not Cited

1.	"The Ghost Writer": The writer "copies" everything from another's work, word-for-word, and passes it off as his or her own.

2.   "The Photocopy": The writer copies a major portion of the text straight from a single source, word-for-word.

3.   "The Poor Disguise": The writer has retained the key content of the source, and has changed the paper's appearance slightly by changing key words and phrases.

4.   "The Potluck Paper": The writer copies from several different sources, tweaking the sentences a bit to make them fit together but retaining the original phrasing for the most part.

5.   "The Labor of Laziness": The writer takes the time and effort to paraphrase most parts of the paper, which were obtained from other sources, and makes all the gathered information fit together.

6.   "The Self-Stealer": The writer "borrows" generously from his or her previous work; thus, the final product is completely unoriginal.

Sources Cited (But Still Plagiarized)

1.   "The Forgotten Footnote": The writer mentions an author's name for a source, but does not include specific information on the location of the material referenced.

2.   "The Misinformer": The writer provides inaccurate information regarding the reference materials, making it impossible to trace.

3.   "The Too-Perfect Paraphrase": The writer properly cites a source, but neglects to enclose text that has been copied verbatim within quotation marks. The writer is falsely claiming original presentation and interpretation of the data, although attributing the basic ideas to the source.

4.   "The Resourceful Citer": The writer cites all sources properly and paraphrases and uses quotations appropriately. However, the paper contains almost no original work. Spotting this form of plagiarism is difficult as it appears like a well-researched document.

5.   "The Perfect Crime": Similar to the preceding item, the writer cites all sources properly and paraphrases and uses quotations appropriately. However, he or she paraphrases other arguments from sources without citation. This way, the ideas become unique (para. 1-12).

Why do Students Plagiarize?

Regardless of intent, plagiarism is plagiarism. Therefore, it helps to address the primary reasons why students plagiarize.

Generally, plagiarism is a result of overwhelming pressure to succeed. Tremendous course requirements with strict deadlines and stringent course work standards often present students with an uphill battle. At home, parents demand remarkable grades, while peers demand less time for studying and more time for socializing. In short, the lure of plagiarism is the idea of an "easy A." In the long term, students believe that good grades will favorably position them in the job market.

While some students are just lazy and intentionally plagiarize, there are also those who commit plagiarism unintentionally. As Plagiarism (2008) states, "…even the most well-intentioned writers sometimes 'appropriate' the work of others without proper authority" (para. 14). Those who are guilty of unintentional plagiarism tend to be unaware of proper citation and referencing techniques. Some students also misuse the paraphrasing technique and fail to retain the key concepts of the paraphrased material. This is why it is extremely important for students to learn the different and correct ways of citing information and to fully understand the nature of plagiarism.

Plagiarism and the Internet

The availability of abundant information online facilitates plagiarism. Although it has existed as an academic menace for years, the introduction of the World Wide Web (WWW) has made plagiarism even easier. Students no longer have to physically visit libraries, obtain required books, and photocopy all the information they need. Technology has made large amounts of data available in a few clicks. "Copy" and "paste" functions allow students to easily create a document, the content of which is sourced from various online sites. A few tweaks here and there, a grammatical alteration and a couple of changes in terminology, and anyone can generate a paper ready for submission.

Perhaps worse than the "copy" and "paste" functions, is the existence of hundreds of online paper mills that facilitate cheating. For a certain cost, these sites provide essays and term papers on a variety of topics. Others even write customized manuscripts for a fee. As Nannerl O. Keohane, the President of Duke University, opines, "New technologies have also made it easier to cheat: the Educational Testing Service notes that one web site providing free term papers to students has averaged 80,000 hits per day" (The Center for Academic Integrity, 1999, p. 2). These only prove that the need to find quick-fix solutions for school requirements has not only made

plagiarism rampant, but has also become a profitable business for individuals who lack academic integrity and honesty.

Impact and Consequences

Academic institutions develop their own guidelines for plagiarism and enforce them accordingly. Therefore, the circumstances surrounding the allegation of an offense, and their relevance, play a large role in the disciplinary action imposed by institutions. These circumstances could include but are not limited to: (a) the students' honesty in relation to the charges and their previous academic history, (b) the magnitude of the offense, (c) the remorse of the students, and (d) the determination of accidental or deliberate offense (Galloway, Kerstetter, & Mazur, 2007).

Students who plagiarize are being unfair to their colleagues who patiently research, write, and cite, especially if the plagiarism goes undetected. Thus, plagiarism also hurts the school by jeopardizing the integrity of the grading system.

The bottom line, however, is that the students who plagiarize end up hurting themselves more than anybody else. Whether they are hit with a failing grade for the course, or are faced with academic sanctions ranging from suspension to expulsion, there are endless consequences attached to plagiarism. A bad record brings challenges in gaining acceptance to better schools. More importantly, plagiarism inhibits the student from acquiring the useful research, writing, referencing, synthesis of ideas, and critical analysis skills that are vital in their life beyond school (Baylor School, n.d.).

On a broader and more serious level, plagiarism is a crime against the original author's literary rights and the copyright owner's property rights. In short, it merits legal action, which could result in imprisonment or payment of a huge amount of fines, if proven (History News Network, n.d.).

Techniques to Avoid Plagiarism

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is the restatement of information and ideas in one's own words and style. However, it is vital to the nature of paraphrasing to retain the original idea of the paraphrased material. Additionally, the source of the information must be duly credited. When this technique is used properly, it

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serves as a powerful tool to guard against plagiarism, and expound on ideas and arguments. However, changing only a few words or phrases in a sentence or revising sentence structure is not considered paraphrasing. In paraphrasing, the words and phrases used must be different from those of the original (Kuhrana, 2008). Likewise, the style and structure of the sentences must be different. Paraphrasing must be done properly in order to become an effective tool against plagiarism.

In the following, we present examples of acceptable and unacceptable paraphrasing as sourced from the Bellevue Community College Writing Lab Series (2004). Note that when the paraphrasing technique is used improperly, the paraphrased material too closely resembles the original, and you remain liable for plagiarism.

Original Source:

If the existence of a signing ape was unsettling for linguists, it was also startling news for animal behaviorists.

–Davis, Eloquent Animals, p. 26

Unacceptable Borrowing of Phrases:

The existence of a signing ape unsettled linguists and startled animal behaviorists (Davis 26).

Unacceptable Borrowing of Structure:

If the presence of a sign-language-using chimp was disturbing for scientists studying language, it was also surprising to scientists studying animal behavior (Davis, p. 26).

Two Acceptable Paraphrases:

When they learned of an ape's ability to use sign language, both linguists and animal behaviorists were taken by surprise (Davis, p. 26).

According to Flora Davis, linguists and animal behaviorists were unprepared for the news that a chimp could communicate with its trainers through sign language (p. 26).

Quoting

According to the University of New South Wales' Learning Centre (2007), a quotation is "an exact reproduction of spoken or written words.

Direct quotes can provide strong evidence, act as an authoritative voice, or support a writer's statements" (para. 6).

When quoting, the phrases or sentences should be enclosed in quotation marks, and should be an exact copy of the text, including capitalization and use of punctuation marks. In addition, the source/s of the information must be clearly indicated. In practice, short direct quotations are integrated into the sentences, while longer ones are set off as a new paragraph. It should be noted, however, that direct quotations should be used sparingly.   That is, they should only be used to corroborate the ideas presented and not in any way replace them (University of South Wales Learning Centre, 2007).

Example:

 "Reputations in academia are made on the basis of creating new knowledge: discoveries of new facts, new ways of looking at previously known facts, original analysis of old ideas" (Standler, 2000, para. 5).

Summarizing

A summary provides "an overview of a text" (Purdue Learning Centre, n.d., para. 9).   When summarizing, the main ideas are obtained and expressed in the writer's own words.   Therefore, unimportant details and examples should be left out, resulting in a condensed material.   Just like paraphrasing, it is important to mention the original source of the summarized ideas (Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2008).

In the following, we detail the steps in summarizing as sourced from the University of Idaho's Advanced Technical Writing site (2006).

a. Read the article.

b. Re-read the article if needed, identifying the important ideas. Remember the key terms used. If the article consists of several paragraphs, note the key concepts of each paragraph and how the ideas flow from one to the other.

c. Write brief summaries for each paragraph, which will serve as your outline of the article.

d. Using your outline, determine the entire article's main point. You will arrive at this based on the preceding steps. Use your own words in creating the outline.

e. Make your draft of the summary using information obtained from the preceding steps. Remember to include all important ideas and use some of the key words used by the author.

f. Where possible, retain the original organization of ideas. Retain the sequence of events as well.

g. Do not forget a conclusion. Include only the important conclusions.

h. Review your summary and revise it as needed. Be succinct, and avoid unnecessary words and phrases (e.g., "the author argues," "the author indicates," etc.).

j. Compare your version with the original to ensure that the key ideas and meanings have been retained (para. 1-7).

To achieve an effective summary, the following tips sourced from the Reading Quest (n.d.) and University of Idaho's Advanced Technical Writing site (2006) are recommended:

a. State the main ideas first.
b. Focus on details that are really essential.
c. Use key words and phrases.
d. Break down larger ideas.
e. Write only enough to convey the gist.
f. Take succinct notes.
g. Use a lower level of technicality than that used by the authors. In other words, make your summary simple and easy to understand even without reading the original version. Your summary should stand on its own.
i. Add no new data nor inject your own ideas.
j. Use a simple organization:
- The main point
- The main results/outcomes
- The conclusions/recommendations

Referencing

Familiarize yourself with the referencing style required by your institution. You may also do a Google search of the citation style you will be using. There are numerous resources available on the Internet to help you in this area. In the following, we provide you links to a number of referencing styles common to specific fields as sourced from Plagiarism (2008):

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Humanities

Chicago

    Writer's Handbook: Chicago Style Documentation
      http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocChicago.html

    Writer's Handbook: Chicago Style Documentation
      http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocChicago.html

    Excellent FAQs on Usage in the Chicago Style
      http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocChicago.html

    Excellent FAQs on Usage in the Chicago Style
      http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/cmosfaq/

    Online! Guide to Chicago Style
      http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/cite7.html

    Writer's Handbook: Chicago Style Documentation
      http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocChicago.html

    Writer's Handbook: Chicago Style Documentation
      http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocChicago.html

MLA (Modern Language Association)

    Writer's Handbook: MLA Style Documentation
      http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocMLA.html

    MLA Citation Style
      http://campusgw.library.cornell.edu/newhelp/res_strategy/
      citing/mla.html

    Online! Guide to MLA Style
      http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/cite5.html

Turabian (an academic style that works in other disciplines as well)

    Turabian Bibliography Samples (Ithaca College Library). Based on
    the 6th edition of Turabian's Manual.
      http://www.ithaca.edu/library/course/turabian.html

    Turabian Style: Sample Footnotes and Bibliographic Entries (6th
    edition) (Bridgewater State College)
      http://www.bridgew.edu/Library/turabian.htm

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Sciences

ACS (American Chemical Society)
> ACS Style Sheet
> http://pubs.acs.org/books/references.shtml

> AMA Citation Style
> http://www.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/workshop/citama.htm

CBE (Council of Biology Editors)
> Online! Guide to CBE Style
> http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/cite8.html

IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers)
> Handbook: Documentation IEEE Style
> http://www.ecf.utoronto.ca/~writing/handbook-docum1b.html

> Electrical Engineering Citation Style
> http://www.lehigh.edu/library/footnote/footee.html

NLM (National Library of Medicine)
> NLM Style Guide
> http://healthlinks.washington.edu/hsl/styleguides/nlm.html

> National Library of Medicine Recommended Formats for
> Bibliographic Citation (PDF format)
> http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/formats/internet.pdf

Vancouver (Biological Sciences)
> Introduction to the Vancouver Style
> http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/infosuss/referencing/ v_intro.shtml

> Vancouver Style References
> http://www.library.uq.edu.au/training/citation/vancouv.html

Social Sciences

AAA (American Anthropological Association)
> Citations and Bibliographic Style for Anthropology Papers
> http://www.usd.edu/anth/handbook/bib.htm

[Note: the AAA style is based on the Chicago style for specific questions not addressed in any of the AAA style guides, please use the links above or consult The Chicago Manual of Style]

APA (American Psychological Association)
> Writer's Handbook: APA Style Documentation

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http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocAPA.html

APA Style Electronic Format
http://www.westwords.com/guffey/apa.html

Online! Guide to APA Style
http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/cite6.html

APA Style.org
http://www.apastyle.org/elecref.html

APSA (American Political Science Association)

Writer's Handbook: APSA Documentation
http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocAPSA.html

Legal Style

Legal Citation: Using and Understanding Legal Abbreviations
http://library.queensu.ca/law/lederman/legalcit.htm

Legal Research and Citation Style in the USA
http://www.rbs0.com/lawcite.htm

Others

General info on citing web documents
http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet /Style.html

Recommended Multi-Style Links
http://www.aresearchguide.com/styleguides.html

http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/ (para. 7)

Conclusion

Plagiarism remains a key issue that school administrators, instructors, researchers, and students need to address. However, with an increasing awareness and innovative tools designed to detect plagiarism, more and more institutions are taking action to prevent it. For instance, professors are now assigning course work that dwells less on collating data and more on the synthesis and analysis of ideas. This obviously lessens the tendency for students to copy text verbatim. In addition, a number of institutions are now using customized tools that have the capabilities to detect, within a matter of seconds, if a student failed to properly acknowledge his or her sources. There are also a number of these tools available on the Internet.

Overall, increasing students' awareness on the issue is the first step towards addressing this "capital crime in an academic setting." It is important

that schools educate their students on the nature and consequences of plagiarism. Perhaps it is even more important for schools to teach proper techniques for citing sources and referencing, preferable at a young age. This can be enforced with the help of instructors as they have direct contact with students.

Students should make a conscious effort to properly acknowledge the sources of their ideas. At times, out of tremendous pressure from their parents, teachers, and friends, students take a quick fix to their research and writing needs. However, with proper guidance and help from their school and even their parents, students can easily overcome this. A number of referencing styles are readily available, and these are easy to learn and apply. It simply requires a little extra effort to learn the techniques and apply them accordingly.

As Sir Isaac Newton said, "If I have seen further (than certain other men), it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants" (Deakin University Study Support Skills, 2008, para. 1). Therefore, all knowledge is built on previous knowledge. It is just but proper that we give due credit to those whose deep thinking and analysis have helped us come up with new insights.

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We provide specialized editorial review services for academic journal submissions, university documents, contributions for publications, and marketing copy.

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We are committed to providing only the most qualified English language specialists, who operate continuously in compliance with accepted standards, while maintaining organizational flexibility by adapting to international language trends.