Plagiarism Tutorial

Graduate Program Harvard Law School

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Lesson Objectives

Whether committed willfully or unintentionally, plagiarism threatens the integrity of information, knowledge and scholarship. Avoiding plagiarism is essential to the worth and success of your work at Harvard.

This tutorial explains what plagiarism is and briefly discusses its legal and ethical consequences. Most importantly, it suggests strategies for taking notes, documenting sources and writing in order to help you avoid accidental plagiarism. A quiz then tests your understanding of the concepts presented in the lesson.

Please note that the citation style used in the tutorial is more informal than the Bluebook style required at Harvard Law School.
What Constitutes Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's work as your own.

This includes summarizing, paraphrasing, copying, or translating words, ideas, artworks, audio materials, videos, computer programs, statistical data, or any other creative work, without proper attribution.

Plagiarism can be deliberate or accidental. It can be partial or complete. No matter which, the penalties are often similar. Understanding what counts as plagiarism is an important step in learning to avoid accidental plagiarism.

Some acts of plagiarism:

- copying and pasting from the Internet without attribution
- buying, stealing, or ghostwriting a paper
- using other people’s ideas without attribution
- paraphrasing an author too lightly
Consequences of Plagiarism

- Plagiarism violates every university’s Honor Code.

- Plagiarism degrades a university’s reputation and diminishes the value of its degrees.

- Plagiarism can earn you a failing grade, suspension, expulsion, or the rescission of a degree, even after graduation.

- Whether or not plagiarism is detected, those who commit it suffer the disadvantages of missed opportunities to learn, grow, and think for themselves.

- But as incidents of plagiarism increase, professors are increasingly on the alert for it. Many have powerful detection tools at their fingertips.
Every paper must develop an argument. Use other scholars’ work to support your own ideas.

Proper documentation will help you avoid plagiarism and will empower you to:

- Join the “great conversation,” in which ideas throughout the world and time are developed and discussed.

- Honor the thinking and intellectual property of other authors by crediting their work.

- Lend authority to your own contributions.

- Help other researchers find the sources that inspired your work.

- Avoid infringing an author's legal copyright. Proper citation of a work used in an educational context is a fair use by law, but without citation, the use of the work crosses ethical—and possibly legal—boundaries.
You do not need to document when you draw on common knowledge or set out your own thoughts, ideas, opinions, observations, or experimental results. An example of common knowledge would be: The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was established in 1947 to encourage international trade and thereby stimulate economic recovery after World War II.

You MUST document whenever you copy an image such as a chart or diagram, or quote from, paraphrase, or summarize another author's work. This requirement covers information from Web pages, books, songs, television programs, e-mail messages, interviews, articles, artworks, or any other medium.
A popular U.S. historian, Doris Kearns Goodwin, recently suffered a blow to her reputation and credibility by plagiarizing several sources. She claimed that the plagiarism was accidental, caused by sloppy note-taking. The first step in avoiding plagiarism and giving proper documentation is to cultivate good note-taking habits.

- Choose a note-taking system such as index cards that will allow you to sort your sources alphabetically when it comes time to include them in your bibliography.

- For each source you use, keep track of the bibliographic data, including the author, title of the work, title of the publication in which the work appears, name of the publisher, date, the pages you consulted, the first and last pages of all articles, and the number or issue of the publication in which an article appears. In short, record whatever information is necessary to properly identify the source.
Note-Taking Tips (2 of 3)

- Annotate each source. An annotation includes the bibliographic data, plus a brief summary describing the content and your thoughts about how useful the source may be to your research. You should also indicate what you know about the author. Is s/he an expert in the field?

- Distinguish verbatim (word for word) passages from the rest of your notes by setting the words off in quotation marks (“”), or by color coding them with a highlighter, crayon, or special font color. Also, be sure to note whom you’re quoting. The author of your source is not necessarily the author of the particular idea or phrase you wish to use. In this case you should track down the original source and verify the passage and citation.

- Notes that are lightly paraphrased (i.e., too similar to the original language) could come back to haunt you. Any time you have not sufficiently rephrased something, mark it with a big PM (for “paraphrase more”) or color code it.
Note-Taking Tips (3 of 3)

To paraphrase is to restate the meaning of a segment of text using other words, either

(1) by expanding and clarifying, or, more often,

(2) by summarizing the main point or points.

- When you jot down your own ideas, distinguish them from your other notes by writing or typing the word "ME" next to them, in big letters.

- If you make photocopies or printouts of your sources, or if you have the original sources in hand, save them until you have finished writing your paper. That way, you can double-check your work against each source to make sure you have not accidentally plagiarized something.
Concerns around Quoting (1 of 2)

Do not rely too much on direct quotations, which should be used infrequently. Use them only to help you set up an argument or to support it by driving the point home.

- Be careful to copy direct quotations word for word. If you must change the length, indicate omitted text with ellipses (…) and place added phrases within brackets. Short quotations must conform to the syntax of the sentence in which you place them.

- Whenever you copy anything, you must put quotation marks around it. Merely citing the source for the quote is not sufficient.

- Any text you quote must be enclosed in quotation marks, and a citation to the source document—including the specific page number used—must follow it directly.
Concerns around Quoting (2 of 2)

- An especially long quotation—one over 49 words—should be written according to the same rules as shorter quotations. However, instead of setting the passage off with quotation marks, set it off by indenting the whole passage and spacing it according to the citation style guide you are asked to use.

- After quoting, explain how the quotation relates to your argument.

- Do not quote from or cite a source that you have not directly consulted.

- The same rules apply to responses to questionnaires or interviews as to material you take from other sources. You must paraphrase or quote, as applicable, and give a citation to the source. In the case of a passage quoted from a phone interview, for example, give a citation including the name of the respondent; his or her title, as appropriate; the fact that you obtained the passage from a phone interview; and the date of the call.
Problems in Paraphrasing (1 of 4)

Paraphrasing is necessary, but it can be dangerous if you don't know how to do it correctly.

- Always indicate whose ideas you are paraphrasing. You can choose whether to introduce a paraphrase with an attribution (for example: according to Howard Gardner . . .), but you must always include the author’s name in the footnote or endnote reference directly after the paraphrase.

- Read your source document carefully until you understand exactly what the author is saying. Then look away and rely on your memory to record the statement in your own words.

- Check your paraphrase against the source for accuracy, and modify phrases that match the original too closely.
Problems in Paraphrasing (2 of 4)

- If you must borrow a unique word or phrase, enclose it in quotation marks.

- Provide a citation to the source document, including the specific page used, at the end of each paraphrased passage.

Because there is a fine line between an acceptable paraphrase and plagiarism, an example of each follows.
Problems in Paraphrasing (3 of 4)

Original Source:

“America today has veered too far in the direction of formal testing without adequate consideration of the costs and limitations of an exclusive emphasis on that approach.”

Paraphrase Version 1:

America has now gone too far toward formal testing, without realizing the costs and limitations of exclusively emphasizing that approach (Gardner 179).

Comments:

Although the source is cited, the paraphrasing retains too much of the original wording and sentence structure.
Problems in Paraphrasing (4 of 4)

Original Source:

“America today has veered too far in the direction of formal testing without adequate consideration of the costs and limitations of an exclusive emphasis on that approach.”

Paraphrase Version 2:

In the United States, the education system places too much emphasis on formal testing, overlooking the limitations and expenses imposed when that assessment strategy is employed exclusively (Gardner 179).

Comments:

This paraphrase is different enough from the original source that it would not be considered plagiarism, as long as Gardner is credited.
Citation Styles

Also referred to as documentation styles, citation styles are standards for citing resources agreed upon within various disciplines. For legal citation, the following citation manuals are commonly used in the U.S.:

- Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation.
- Association of Legal Writing Directors (ALWD) Citation Manual.
- University of Chicago Manual of Legal Citation (Maroonbook).

- At Harvard Law School, the Bluebook is the accepted style.

- For specific rules regarding footnotes, including the documentation of special types of materials, multiple authors, editors, or translators, as well as directions on whether and how to use parenthetical references, consult the Bluebook. Use the “Quick Reference” inside the Bluebook’s front cover to see examples for each type of source.
Citing from the Internet (1 of 2)

Sometimes it is necessary to cite to an internet source if a printed version does not exist or is not available. It should be treated as an unpublished source. If possible, the author and title of the piece and the title of any periodical publishing the piece should be included. Furthermore, the pagination and date of publication should also be included if possible. The URL should then be added to the end of the citation.

Let us say, for example, that you want to cite to a book entitled *Something Inside So Strong: A Resource Guide on Human Rights in the United States*, which was published by the United States Human Rights Network in 2002. You only have the book in electronic format which you found on the web. This is how you would cite it:

Citing from the Internet (2 of 2)

If you are citing to something that is only available on the web, you will also need to give the date when you last visited the site, for example:

Works Cited


5 Seattle Community College Libraries, supra note 2.

6 Ibid.

7 Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL), supra note 3.

Quiz: You Be the Judge

The following practice quiz tests your knowledge of the principles reviewed in this tutorial. It also provides a valuable extension of the lesson by assessing your answers and providing feedback that elaborates on basic points.

Quiz with Feedback