

On Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of passing off someone else's work as your own.

It sounds like simple dishonesty, and it often is. Anyone who buys, borrows, or steals a paper to turn in as his/her own work knows he/she is plagiarizing. Anyone who copies word-for-word--or who copies, changing a word here and there--WITHOUT ENCLOSING THE COPIED PASSAGE IN QUOTATION MARKS AND IDENTIFYING THE AUTHOR should know that he/she is plagiarizing.

But plagiarism can be more complicated in act and intent.

Paraphrase, which is stating something in different words, can be a useful device, but it can lead, more or less unintentionally, to plagiarism. Jotting down notes and ideas from sources, and then using them without proper identification may result in a paper which is only a mosaic of others' words and ideas. Even the use of particular phrases may constitute plagiarism. And too much proofreading or rhetorical help from friends may also amount to plagiarism.

Writing courses pose particular problems. The conscientious writer keeps careful track of sources and diligently tries to distinguish between what is his/her own and what comes from others. Did part of what you are saying come from an identifiable source? Say so. If in doubt, talk with your instructor. If you are getting help from someone other than your instructor, let your instructor know, so that the two of you together can decide what kind and how much outside help is proper.

In a discussion of plagiarism, it is hard to avoid talking about ideas as if they were objects like tables and chairs. Of course they are not. You should not feel that you are under pressure to invent new ideas--which is probably impossible. So-called original writing consists of thinking through ideas and expressing them in your own way. The result may not be new, but if honestly done, it may well be interesting and worthwhile. Other people may add to your thoughts. When they do so in identifiable and specific ways, give them the credit they deserve.

The examples following should make clear the dishonest and the proper use of source material.

THE SOURCE

It is not generally recognized that at the same time when women are making their way into every corner of our work-world, only one percent of the professional engineers in the nation are female. A generation ago this statistic would have raised no eyebrows, but today it is hard to believe. The engineering schools, reacting to social and governmental pressures, have opened wide their gates and are recruiting women with zeal. The major corporations, reacting to even more intense pressures, are offering attractive employment opportunities to practically all women engineering graduates.

From Samuel C. Florman, "Engineering and The Female Mind" Copyright by *Harper's Magazine*

Word for Word Plagiarizing

In the following example, after devising part of a first sentence, the writer simply copies from the source.

Because women seem to be taking jobs of all kinds, few people realize that only 1 percent of the professional engineers in the nation are female. A generation ago this statistic would have raised no eyebrows, but today it is hard to believe. The engineering schools, reacting to social and governmental pressures, have opened wide their gates and are recruiting women with zeal. The major corporations, reacting to even more intense pressures, are offering attractive employment

opportunities to practically all women engineering graduates.

Quotation marks around all the copied text, followed by a footnote, would avoid plagiarism. But a paper consisting largely of quoted passages would be relatively worthless.

Plagiarizing by Paraphrase

In this case the writer follows the movement of the source substituting words and sentences but keeping the meaning of original.

Original

It is not generally recognized that at the same time when women are making their way into every corner of our work-world, only 1 percent of the professional engineers in the nation are female.

Paraphrase

Few people realize, now that women are finding jobs in all fields, that a tiny percentage of the country's engineers are women.

A generation ago this statistic would have raised no eyebrows, but today it is hard to believe.

Years ago this would have surprised no one but now it seems incredible.

The engineering schools, reacting to societal and governmental pressures, have opened wide their gates and are recruiting women with zeal. The major corporations, reacting to even more intense pressure, are offering attractive employment opportunities to practically all women engineering graduates.

Under great pressure, engineering schools are searching out women, and big companies are offering good jobs to practically all women who graduate with engineering degrees.

The writer could avoid plagiarism here by acknowledging the source and providing a footnote:

*Samuel Florman points out that few people realize. . . .*¹

Properly used, paraphrase is a valuable technique. You should use it to *simplify* or *summarize* so that the ideas or information, properly acknowledged, may be woven into the pattern of your *own* ideas. You should not use paraphrase simply to avoid quotation and the appearance of too much dependence on sources.

Mosaic Plagiarism

Here the writer lifts phrases and terms from the source and embeds them in his own prose.

The pressure is on to get more women into engineering. The engineering schools and major corporations have opened wide their gates and are recruiting women zealously. *Practically* all women engineering graduates *can find* attractive jobs. *Nevertheless, at the moment,* only 1 percent of the professional engineers in the *country* are female.

Mosaic plagiarism may be caused by sloppy notetaking, but it *always* looks thoroughly dishonest and will be judged as such.

Again, using quotation marks around original wording avoids the charge of plagiarism but when overdone makes for a patchwork paper. When most of what you want to say comes from a source, either quote directly or paraphrase, and provide footnotes.

The secret of using sources productively is to USE them to support and amplify YOUR ideas. If you

find, as you work at paraphrasing, quoting, footnoting, that you are only glueing sources together, that too much of your paper comes from your sources and not enough from your own mind, go back to the drawing boards.

If you have doubts about the way you are using sources, TALK TO YOUR TEACHER

Source: <http://www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/j/t/jth/PSU017/PLAGIARI.html>