

The Perils of Plagiarism

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Abstract

This essay illuminates the issue of plagiarism and how faculty members can combat the problem in student writing. Plagiarism is not a new problem, but with the advent of the Internet and the increase of Web sites that will sell students essays, it is a problem that has some new and complex challenges. There are some guidelines that can be followed to insure that sources are given the credit they deserve in papers.

## The Perils of Plagiarism

Plagiarism is not a new problem; it has been around as long as professors have been assigning research papers. Modern methods of documentation have made giving credit to the original source of the ideas or information easy, yet plagiarism continues to be a problem for both student and professor. Since writing involves using the thoughts and research of others, it is important to give credit to those whose ideas you are using. **(Thesis Statement)**

A good place to begin in the discussion would be with a definition of plagiarism. “Derived from a Latin word for kidnapper, plagiarism means using another person’s language or ideas without acknowledgement” (Coyle, 1999, p. 95). **(short direct quotation)** Perhaps the problem for many students lies not just in deciding exactly what must be documented, but in realizing that part of the documentation process involves the use of quotation marks. “Any piece of information not set off with quotation marks must be in your own words. Otherwise, even though you name your source, you plagiarize by stealing original phrasing” (Reinking, Hart, & von der Osten, 1999, p. 385). **(short direct quotation, multiple authors)**

As Lester (1999) reminds us, “Quotation marks are an absolute must when using someone else’s exact words” (p. 119). **(short direct quotation with author mentioned in the text)** There is more to this business of giving credit, however, than just identifying the material to be quoted directly and being certain to put quotation marks around it when it is being used in a paper. The writer needs to carefully document the source of information that is not common knowledge, as well as all numerical data. “The best antidote to plagiarism is good note taking” (Ballenger, 1998, p. 109). **(short direct quotation with one author)**

The subject of plagiarism has come under more intense study in the last several years. “Academic dishonesty on college campuses has been the subject of much research in recent

years” (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1999, p. 211). **(magazine article with multiple authors)** What could account for such a renewed interest in an old problem? Are students being less careful about using sources or is this intentional theft of information? “Despite warnings to students about consequences, plagiarism can still occur. And, distinguishing between students who unintentionally misrepresent their work and the minority who make a conscious decision to do so is equally frustrating” (“Bytes,” 1999, p. 37). **(newspaper article with no author)**

More than likely, the recent increase in plagiarized materials can be traced to the use of the Internet for research. “Plagiarism is not a new problem, but with the Internet, it may be more challenging than it has ever been” (Rooks, 2000, ¶ 25). **(article from an electronic source with paragraph numbers)** Checking each individual term paper’s information against Internet sites used to be a time-consuming process for teachers. This same process has now become a virtual gold mine for Web entrepreneurs willing to perform this process for a fee.

Just as the Internet has brought a proliferation of Web sites that help students plagiarize, professors can now fight back by turning to Web sites and computer programs that help detect whether students cheated on their papers. But doing so costs money that may not be easy to find in departmental budgets. (Carnevale, 1999, A49) **(newspaper article with author) (quotation longer than 40 words; block format needed)**

While there are those educators who criticize the use of a service such as Plagiarism.org or Glatt Plagiarism Services Inc., both companies specializing in detecting plagiarism, such services are becoming increasingly popular in spite of costs. “Ultimately, what I’m doing is determining originality of authorship”, states Barbara Glatt, president of the company (personal communication, July 12, 2000). **(interview) (do not include personal communication in References)**

The continuous sharing of information on plagiarism and ways to combat it is certainly one way to deal with this problem. Writing in *The Education Digest*, Isakson (2000) reminds the reader, “A great site for additional resources is the Plagiarism Theme Page. . . . It provides a collection of sites for identifying and teaching about plagiarism” (p. 79). **(Journal with separate pagination and wording omitted in quotation between sentences) (Use four spaced ellipsis points to indicate any omission of material between two sentences and only three ellipsis points to show an omission within a sentence)**

Another method of preventing plagiarism is to be constantly aware of the various rules that will help you if you follow them. In *Writing Research Papers*, Lester (1999) mentions five rules that bear listing:

#### Rules for Avoiding Plagiarism

1. Let the reader know when you begin borrowing from a source by introducing the quotation or paraphrase with the name of the authority.
2. Enclose within quotation marks all quoted materials.
3. Make certain that paraphrased material has been rewritten into your own style and language. The simple rearrangement of sentence patterns is unacceptable.
4. Provide specific in-text documentation for each borrowed item, but keep in mind that styles differ from MLA, APA, the number system, and the footnote system.

(p. 119) **(author mentioned in text) (Block quotation)**

Plagiarism is on the increase, partially due to carelessness and partially due to deliberately not giving credit to the source from which information was taken. Documentation of information, both parenthetically within the body of the paper and full documentation on the References page will help avoid even the suspicion of plagiarism. There is nothing wrong with

using information from other sources as long as the writer gives proper credit to those sources in the research paper.

## References

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