

PLAGIARISM

A UNA STUDENT GUIDE

Just what is plagiarism anyway?

An examination of the University of North Alabama's Academic Honesty statement shows how serious plagiarism is and how seriously the academic community views it. To gain a better understanding of the issue, let's take a closer look.

The concept of plagiarism is defined as:

plagiarism /plájɪrɪzəm/ *n.* **1** the act or an instance of plagiarizing. **2** something plagiarized. **plagiarist** *n.*

plagiaristic *adj.*

plagiarize /plájɪrɪz/ *v. tr.* (also *absol.*) **1** take and use (the thoughts, writings, inventions, etc., of another person) as one's own. **2** pass off the thoughts, etc., of (another person) as one's own. **plagiarizer** *n.* [L. *plagiarius* kidnapper *f.* *plagium* a kidnapping *f.* Gk *plagion*] (*The Oxford American Dictionary and Language Guide* 758)

In essence, plagiarism means to use someone else's work without giving proper credit to the originator. The "work" could be published or unpublished materials, including such things as art, computer programs, graphs, music, websites, or any other form of creative or original expression. The act of plagiarism can be committed *deliberately*, as in purchasing a research paper from a commercial source (term paper mill), "borrowing" a completed paper from a student who had previously taken the same class, having someone else write a paper for you, or by downloading material from the Internet and submitting it as your own work. It can even be submitting a paper that you prepared for one class as fulfillment for an assignment in another class without receiving permission from your instructor. The latter is a form of "self plagiarism."

Plagiarism can also occur *unintentionally*. This happens when you have been careless in taking notes—neglecting to record quotations word-for-word or omitting quotations marks and the appropriate citation for the source of the quotation. It can also happen when you have not paraphrased another's words properly, when you have neglected to cite or give credit to authors as you have summarized their work, or when you have incorrectly assumed that a fact is common knowledge and thus have failed to indicate the source of your information. Ignorance or a lack of understanding is no excuse for plagiarism—it is still **wrong!**

According to *Successful College Writing*, you have plagiarized if you have done any of the following:

- Copied information word for word from a source without using quotation marks
- Paraphrased information and not cited the source
- Used someone else's organization or sequence of ideas without acknowledging the source
- Reused someone else's visual material (graphs, tables, charts, maps, diagrams) without acknowledging the source
- Submitted someone else's work as your own (McWhorter, 592)

What's so wrong with plagiarism?

Well, in the first place, it is dishonest. For instance, by allowing the reader of your paper to assume that any undocumented ideas or phrases are your own, you deny the rightful authors or originators credit for their work. This is a form of cheating. Not only are you cheating the author and the University, but you are also cheating yourself. Successful completion of courses and/or a degree program indicates that you have had specific experiences and have acquired certain knowledge and

capabilities. If you have not had the full experience, for example, of going through all of the steps involved in researching and writing a term paper, you have shortchanged yourself and perhaps received credit for what you did not do. Penalties for plagiarism at UNA may range from a failing grade for a specific assignment to a failing grade in the course to suspension from the University (in repeat cases). Plagiarism may ultimately damage not only your own reputation, but that of the University as well—a reputation that is based in part upon the abilities and performance of its graduates.

What can I do to avoid plagiarizing?

The variety of sources available via the Internet and other electronic sources and the ease of “cut and paste” make it especially important that you be diligent in documenting your sources. First of all, learn which sources need to be cited and which ones do not. You do not need to document information that is widely known by the general public (for example, that in the U.S. the Fourth of July is also known as “Independence Day”). Facts that are readily available in a variety of sources such as encyclopedias or textbooks need not be cited. Additionally, data that you have collected yourself through such means as questionnaires or observations and your opinions about the data need no citations.

However, according to *The New St. Martin’s Handbook*, you **must** credit sources for the following:

- Direct quotations
- Facts that are not widely known or assertions that are arguable
- Judgments, opinions, and claims of others
- Statistics, charts, tables, and graphs from any source
- Help provided by friends, instructors, or others (Lunsford and Connors, 496)

Citation Style

An important step in avoiding plagiarism is to learn the proper citation format for your particular discipline or field of study. Some of the commonly used citation formats or style manuals include MLA (Modern Language Association), APA (American Psychological Association), Chicago, and CBE (Council of Biology Editors). Your instructor will tell you which to use for your course. A reference librarian can assist you in locating copies of the appropriate guide. The Center for Writing Excellence has a number of writing resources and tutors available to assist in using one of these style guides.

Paraphrasing

One area in which students frequently run into trouble is in trying to paraphrase an author’s words. According to *The New St. Martin’s Handbook*:

A **paraphrase** accurately states all the relevant information from a passage *in your own words and phrasing*, without any additional comments or elaborations. [. . .] Unlike a summary, a paraphrase always restates *all* the main points of a passage in the same order, and often in about the same number of words.[. . .]

In order to paraphrase without plagiarizing inadvertently, *use your own words and sentence structures*; do not simply substitute synonyms, and do not imitate an author’s style. [. . .] A good way of assuring your originality is to paraphrase without looking at the source; then check to see that the paraphrase accurately presents the author’s meaning and that you have used your own words and phrasing. (Lunsford and Connors 488)

Summarizing

A **summary** is a significantly shortened version of a passage, a section, or even a whole chapter or work that *captures main ideas in your own words*. Unlike a paraphrase, a summary uses just enough information to record the main points or the points you wish to emphasize. (Lunsford and Connors 491)

The New St. Martin's Handbook offers the following tips for properly acknowledging your sources:

- Maintain an accurate and thorough working bibliography.
- Establish a consistent note-taking system, listing sources and page numbers and clearly identifying all quotations, paraphrases, summaries, statistics, and graphics.
- Identify all quotations with quotation marks—both in your notes and (except for block quotations) in your essay.
- Be sure that you summarize and paraphrase using your own words and sentence structures.
- In your essay, give a citation for each quotation, paraphrase, summary, arguable assertion or opinion, statistic, and graph that is from a source.
- Prepare an accurate and complete list of sources cited according to the required documentation style. (Lunsford and Connors 497)

“By understanding what material you must document, taking systematic, accurate notes, and giving full credit to sources in both parenthetical citations and your list of sources cited, you can avoid unintended plagiarism.” (Lunsford and Connors 495)

Where can I go for more information?

Visit the Reference Desk located in Collier Library or contact us online using the “Ask a Librarian” link located on the Library’s homepage <http://www.una.edu/library/>.

Visit the Center for Writing Excellence located in the Stone Lodge or online at <http://www.una.edu/writingcenter/index.html>.

You can also try the following websites for additional help in understanding and avoiding plagiarism:

Avoiding Plagiarism: Overview and Contradictions. Purdue Online Writing Lab. 1 Jan. 2010. Web. 26 Mar. 2010. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

Writing Resources. Center for Writing Excellence, University of North Alabama, 2010. Web. 26 Mar. 2010. <http://www.una.edu/writingcenter/writing-resources.html>

Works Cited

“Academic Honesty.” *University of North Alabama 2010 – 2011 Catalog* 2010: 41. Web.

Lunsford, Andrea and Robert Connors. *The New St. Martin's Handbook*. Boston: Bedford, 1999. 484-97. Print.

McWhorter, Kathleen T. *Successful College Writing*. Boston: Bedford, 2009. 592. Print.

The Oxford American Dictionary and Language Guide. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 758. Print.