



## PLAGIARISM

Most of your college writing will depend upon outside sources such as books, articles, and interviews with experts. When you draw upon such sources in your own writing, you need to acknowledge the source by proper documentation. If you do not acknowledge the source, you are, in effect, stealing material from another writer. This stealing is called plagiarism and is a serious offense within the academic world.

### **Plagiarism usually takes two forms:**

1. You may copy a passage word for word from a source, without putting that passage within quotation marks and documenting the source in a footnote or endnote.

Cause: Sometimes when you take notes, you may be tired or rushed. You begin to write down only some main ideas and a few phrases, but soon, without knowing it, you begin to write down longer passages. When you go back to your notes, you think that the passages are your own because you have not indicated quotation marks or page numbers, and you incorporate this material into your own essay.

Remedy: Whenever you take notes, begin by indicating the page number in the source. Always place quotation marks around words that you copy from the source, even if it is only one word.

2. You paraphrase a passage from the source using many of the words that the author used, although you do make some changes. You don't document the source in a footnote or endnote.

Cause: You have read the source so many times that you feel you know it by heart, and when you sit down to write you can't think of any other way to present the material. Besides, the writer of the source is a *much* better writer than you are.

Remedy: You have not fully thought through the material if you are serving only as a conduit for the author's ideas. In your own essay, you need to show that you have synthesized many sources and, most important, that you offer analysis and interpretation, rather than just a report of what experts say. A paraphrase needs to show your own ideas, not just someone else's ideas in a slightly different wording from the original. If you want to paraphrase a passage because you are focusing on someone else's ideas, then refer to that person in your essay when you include the paraphrase.

Scholarly writing emphasizes your own originality of analysis and interpretation. You are serving not merely as a compiler of other people's ideas, but you are presenting your own ideas, *based* upon sources.

## Examples

Here is a passage from "Warfare: An Invention - Not a Biological Necessity" by Margaret Mead. In this essay, Mead says that warfare:

is an invention like any other of the inventions in terms of which we order our lives, such as writing, marriage, cooking our food instead of eating it raw, trial by jury, or burial of the dead, and so on. Some of this list any one will grant are inventions: trial by jury is confined to very limited portions of the globe; we know that there are tribes that do not bury their dead but instead expose or cremate them; and we know that only part of the human race has had a knowledge of writing as its cultural inheritance. But, whenever a way of doing things is found universally, such as the use of fire or the practice of some form of marriage, we tend to think at once that it is not an invention at all but an attribute of humanity itself.

### Here is how one student used this passage in his essay:

We know that there are many cultures that do not have warfare, and therefore it seems that warfare, *is an invention like any other of the inventions in terms of which we order our lives, such as writing, marriage, cooking our food instead of eating it raw, trial by jury, or burial of the dead.*

You can see that the italicized portion comes directly from Mead's texts. Therefore this passage is *plagiarized*. It does not matter that the inventions that Mead lists could have been listed by anyone else. It does not matter that the student learned this material from Mead, and thinks that he doesn't need to document everything that he has learned. The fact is this: this material comes directly from another writer, is not placed within quotation marks, is not documented, and therefore is stolen.

### Here is how another student used Mead's text:

We know that there are many cultures that do not have warfare, and therefore warfare seems to be just another invention, much like marriage, or cooking food, or burying the dead. After all, we know that some cultures do not bury the dead. Yet whenever we find a behavior occurring universally, we think that it is not an invention, but an inevitable part of the human race.

Although this student changed some of the wording, the passage is very close to Mead's own ideas. It is not a good idea to paraphrase so closely. And certainly any paraphrase needs to be documented by a footnote or endnote.

### Here is how yet another student used Mead's text:

One way of deciding whether or not a cultural behavior is an invention is seeing how pervasive it is other cultures. We are aware of wide variations in such behavior as marriage, nurturing children, or division of labor by gender, so we know that these behaviors are not inherent to all humans. Likewise, we know that warfare does not exist in many cultures, supporting the idea that it is merely an invention.

Here, the student substantially changes Mead's wording and adds information of his own that he has gotten from other sources. By synthesizing information from other sources, he is showing that his understanding goes beyond what Mead has told him. He applies Mead's ideas to other readings. This passage is not plagiarized.

**Here is yet another student's work:**

The case that warfare is nothing more than an invention is made strongly by the anthropologist Margaret Mead, who compares such aggressive behavior with marriage, cooking food, and burying the dead. These behaviors, like warfare, are not practiced universally, and so can justly be called an invention. Only when something is practiced universally, Mead says, do we conclude "that it is not an invention at all but an attribute of humanity."

Here, the student is referring directly in his essay to the work of Margaret Mead. Therefore, the paraphrase at the beginning serves as a summary of Mead's ideas. It is clear to the reader that the ideas presented are Mead's and not the author's. At the end of this passage, the author decides to quote a part of Mead's text, and we know *from the information within the essay* that this material is from Mead. This passage is not plagiarized.

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