

**STUDENT GUIDE TO AVOIDING PLAGIARISM:
HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE RESEARCH PAPER**

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Student Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism

Introduction

By its very nature, writing involves both individual and collaborative activity. Even when a piece of writing has only one author, that author employs a language system that is shared by others and draws upon ideas and values that are not his or hers alone. Indeed, one of the most important parts of becoming a writer within the academic community is learning how to balance the obligations of individuality and collaboration.

As a college writer, you are expected to use writing to develop and assert your own ideas and beliefs – to think for yourself. But at the same time you are expected to engage the thinking of others, to place your own writing within the context of academic discourse by using and criticizing arguments from that discourse. This double obligation provides a framework in which to discuss plagiarism.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged and inappropriate use of the ideas or wording of another writer. Because plagiarism corrupts values in which the university community is fundamentally committed – the pursuit of knowledge, intellectual honesty – plagiarism is considered a grave violation of academic integrity and the sanctions against it are correspondingly severe. Plagiarism can be characterized as “academic theft.”

Plagiarism is:

- The submission of material authored by another person but represented as the student’s own work, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form.
- The submission of material subjected to editorial revision by another person that results in substantive changes in content or major alteration of writing style and
- Improper acknowledgment of sources in essays, papers, or presentations.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Because of the serious nature of plagiarism, you should ensure that any writing you submit represents your own assertions and abilities, and incorporates other texts in an open and honest manner. The best way to avoid plagiarism is to be careful to document your sources, even when you are making use of data or ideas rather than an actual quotation. In academic assignments, writing is assumed to be the original words and thoughts of the student unless told otherwise (i.e., material from other sources is clearly and properly cited).

When to Document Outside Sources

Example 1 Repeating Another’s Words Without Acknowledgment

Original Source

(From Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. New York: Penguin, 1985. 127-128.)

The television commercial is the most peculiar and pervasive form of communication to issue forth from the electric plug...The move away from the use of propositions in commercial advertising began at the end of the nineteenth century. But it was not until the 1950's that the television commercial made linguistic discourse obsolete as the basis for product decisions. By substituting images for claims, the pictorial commercial made emotional appeal, not tests of truth, the basis for consumer decisions.

Plagiarized Version

Television commercials have made language obsolete as a basis for making decisions about products. The pictorial commercial has substituted images for claims and thereby made emotional appeal, rather than tests of truth, the basis for consumer decisions.

Although the writer has changed, rearranged, and deleted words in the version above, the text is essentially the same as the original source. In paraphrasing, you take the writer's ideas and put them in your own words. It is not a process of substituting synonyms or rearranging the order of words. Even if the version above gave credit to Postman for his ideas, the passage would be considered plagiarized.

Correctly Paraphrased and Documented Version

Postman argues that television commercials do not use language or "test of truth" to help viewers decide whether to buy a product. Instead, they rely on images to create an emotional appeal that influences consumers' decisions (127-128).

In the version above, most of the ideas have been paraphrased or restated in the writer's own words. Quotation marks have been placed around a key phrase

that is taken directly from the original source. In addition, the name of the author refers readers to a corresponding entry in the Works Cited page, and the page number indicates the location of the information in the source cited.

Example 2 Presenting Another Writer's Argument or Point of View Without Acknowledgment

Original Source

(From Arlene Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise*. New York: Basic Books, 1991. 11.)

The changes in larger society, as well as their reverberations in the family, call into question basic assumptions about the nature of American society, its family arrangements, and Americans themselves. A "Cultural Struggle" ensues as people debate the meaning of change. One of these periods of cultural upheaval occurred in the early decades of the nineteenth century; a second occurred in the decades just before and after the turn of the twentieth century. For the last thirty years, we have been living through another such wave of social change.

Three related structural changes seem to have set the current cycle of family change in motion: first, the shift into a "postindustrial" information and service economy; second, a demographic revolution that not only created mass longevity but reshaped the individual and family life course, creating life stages and circumstances unknown to earlier generations; third, a process I call "psychological gentrification," which involves an introspective approach to experience, a greater sense of one's own individuality and subjectivity, a concern with self-fulfillment and self-development. This is the change misdiagnosed as narcissism.

Plagiarized Version

Three periods of cultural upheaval in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have caused major changes in American society. The first occurred during the beginning of the nineteenth century, the second during the decades before and after 1900, and the third has been underway for the last thirty years. Three structural changes occurring during the current upheaval are primarily responsible for changes in American families. These include the development of a postindustrial information and service economy, demographics changes (including longer life spans that have created new and different life stages), and an increased sense of individuality including a desire for self-fulfillment and self-development.

The writer of the passage above correctly paraphrases Skolnick's ideas but does not give her credit for her ideas or line of argument. The version below eliminates the plagiarism by attributing the ideas to Skolnick.

Correctly Paraphrased and Documented Version

According to Skolnick, three periods of cultural upheaval in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have caused major changes in American society. The first occurred during the beginning of the nineteenth century, the second during the decades before and after 1900, and the third has been underway for the last thirty years. Three structural changes occurring during the current upheaval are primarily responsible for changes in American families. These include the development of a postindustrial information and service economy, demographics changes (including longer life spans that have created new and different life stages), and an increased sense of individuality including a desire for self-fulfillment and self-development (11).

In the version above, a reader would be able to locate the source by finding the title of Skolnick's book in the Works Cited page and looking on page 11, the number indicated at the end of the paragraph.

Example 3 Repeating Another Writer's Particularly Apt Phrase or Term Without Acknowledgment

Original Source

(From Arlene Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise*. New York: Basic Books, 1991.11.)

Three related structural changes seem to have set the current cycle of family change in motion: first, the shift into a "postindustrial" information and service economy; second, a demographic revolution that not only created mass longevity but reshaped the individual and family life course, creating life stages and circumstances unknown to earlier generations; third, a process I call "psychological gentrification," which involves an introspective approach to experience, a greater sense of one's own individuality and subjectivity, a concern with self-fulfillment and self-development. This is the change misdiagnosed as narcissism.

Plagiarized Version

The large number of "self-help" books published each year attest to Americans' concern with self-improvement and achieving more fulfilling lives. This process might be described as "psychological gentrification."

Correctly Paraphrased and Documented Version

The large number of self-help books published each year attest to Americans'

concern with self-improvement and their desire to have a more fulfilling life. Skolnick labels this process as “psychological gentrification” (11).

As this example illustrates, putting quotation marks around a borrowed word or phrase is not sufficient documentation. You must also acknowledge the author and give the page number so a reader would be able to consult the original source and locate the word or phrase. In the original source, Skolnick takes credit (“a process I call”) for coining the term “psychological gentrification.” Quotation marks in the original appear to be used for emphasis. Phrases in quotations should be cited unless they have become common usage (e.g., “postindustrial” in the original source above).

Notetaking and Proofreading

Good paraphrasing skills allow a writer to make use of source material in a fluid and honest way. However, proper notetaking and careful proofreading, which come before and after the writing, can be just as important for producing high-quality and accurately attributed scholarship.

When taking notes, do not copy directly from a source into your notes unless you intend to quote that source directly. Rather, read carefully, take time to think, and then write down, in your own words, the main ideas of what you have read. Of course, be sure to note the source for proper citation. These notes will become the basis of your summary. Skipping the notetaking step and paraphrasing directly from a source into a draft of your work not only limits your ability to think through the ideas for yourself but also

increases the likelihood that you will commit plagiarism. Use notetaking as an opportunity to develop and organize your own ideas.

Proofreading, like notetaking, is a vital step in the writing process, one that students too often skip. Proofreading offers the opportunity to check your work for errors of spelling and punctuation as well as overall fluidity of style and coherence of argument. It is also the time to verify all reference and citations. Do not, however, wait until proofreading to include citations. Citations should be included in the first draft. It is simply too easy to omit a reference accidentally and then forget the source of a fact, quotation, or paraphrase.

Citation Conventions

After determining when to cite, the writer must decide how to cite. Check with your instructor about the format most appropriate for your course and assignment. Two of the basic formats are numbered reference notes (either footnote or endnote) and a method of parenthetical reference. Check at the library for current style manuals.

Steps in Writing an Effective Research Paper

1. General search and elimination of unreliable sources.
Test for authority, objectivity, accuracy, currency, and content relevancy
2. Compose thesis
It should be your analysis not a summary of ideas from your sources
3. Visit instructor during office hours

- Receive feedback on your thesis and your sources
4. Notetaking
Develop a process (i.e., index cards), be consistent in how you take notes which reflect a direct quote or paraphrase
 5. Prepare an outline of your paper
Organize it by subtopic, eliminate notes and unused sources
 6. Prepare rough draft
Be sure to cite sources, use your bibliography
 7. Proofread, edit, revise
Be sure to submit by the due date or ask instructor for extension if necessary

Electronic Resources

Increasingly, students rely on electronic resources (the World Wide Web, on line documents, etc.) as reference materials. It is important to remember that electronic resources must be cited and, when appropriate, quoted, in the same way traditional printed resources are. While canons of style for citing electronic resources are incomplete and evolving, the following would be of assistance:

Li, X., and Crane, N.B. (1996)
Electronic styles: a handbook for citing electronic information. Medford, N.J.: Information Today.

MLA Citation style

<http://www.uvm.edu/~ncrane/estyles/mla.html>

APA Citation style

<http://www.uvm.edu/~ncrane/estyles/apa.html>

Resources

Your Instructor:

Individual instructors in all university courses may specify additional requirements for their assignments. Consult with the instructor prior to beginning the assignment to clarify standards.

Writing Center,

Humanities 528 (714) 278-3650

While the center is primarily for students enrolled in English Department writing classes, tutors will assist all university students in writing papers for CSUF classes. Tutors will offer constructive suggestions, but will not proofread or edit papers.

Pollak Library

(714) 278-2633

<http://www.library.fullerton.edu/>

Take a tour of the library, attend a workshop on research skills, contact a research librarian, and check out writing resources on their web site.

Judicial Affairs

Titian Student Union, Room 235

(714) 278-3211

Contact the Dean of Students Office, Judicial Affairs if you have questions about this publication or other academic integrity issues.