



According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, to "plagiarize" means

1. to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
2. to use (another's production) without crediting the source
3. to commit literary theft
4. to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

In short, plagiarism involves both stealing someone's work and then lying about it by trying to pass it off as one's own. Words and ideas that are written, whether in print or on the internet, are the intellectual property of their author(s)!

All of the following are considered to be plagiarism:

- handing in someone else's work as your own
- copying words/ideas from someone else's work without giving credit
- not using quotation marks when taking a sentence word-for-word
- giving incorrect information on your original source
- changing the words but copying the sentence structure without acknowledging your source
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work

To avoid plagiarism you simply need to acknowledge the original sources of your work, through the use of citations! To learn how to use citations, please refer to our Style Guide.

### **Some Common Problems**

#### **1. Expectations**

The work you produce for your courses, whether at Adult High School or in a post-secondary institution, needs to be original! When you are asked to write an essay or a research paper on a specific topic you are not being asked to simply report on the information that's out there by borrowing from several sources. Rather, you are being asked to create something original based on the resources available to you! Your work should mostly contain **YOUR WORK**, not the work of others! Your teacher is interested in **your** thoughts and ideas on the topic. The research aspect of a research paper is there to provide you with enough information for you to be able to formulate your own thought and ideas.

#### **2. Plagiarism vs. Paraphrasing**

Paraphrasing is the act of taking someone else's work and putting it in your own words. Paraphrasing allows you to show that your ideas are supported by others, showing that your thesis is strong and valid. Good paraphrasing will strengthen your paper by emphasizing your main argument with information that is directly relevant. When paraphrasing, you must retain the essential ideas of the original but you must also change the style and grammatical structure. The following is taken from the Turnitin resources:

**Bogna Haddad, 2008.**

## How to Paraphrase Properly

The following is an excerpt from a 1949 essay by Richard Hofstadter entitled "The Thesis Disputed."

*American historical writing in the past century has produced two major theories or models of understanding, the economic interpretation of politics associated with Charles A. Beard, and the frontier interpretation of American development associated with Frederick Jackson Turner. Both views have had a pervasive influence upon American thinking, but Beard himself felt that Turner's original essay on the frontier had "a more profound influence on thought about American history than any other essay or volume ever written on the subject." ...*

*[But] it became plain, as new thought and research was brought to bear upon the problem, that the frontier theory, as an analytic device, was a blunt instrument.*

Let's say you want to communicate ALL of the information above by paraphrasing. You might start by taking out some of the unnecessary words and changing others. For instance, do you need to say "theories or models," or is just "theories" enough for your purposes? Can you rephrase the last sentence to make it fit better with your style of writing? Asking questions like this is a good way to start paraphrasing, but it is only the beginning.

You want to make sure that you are not just changing the appearance of the source while still copying its essential structure. That is, you need to translate the passage into your own voice. Otherwise, you are plagiarizing Richard Hofstadter's expression, even if you acknowledge that the ideas came from him. For example, the following would be an example of plagiarism, not paraphrasing:

*In the past century, American writing on history has produced two major theories, Charles A. Beard's economic interpretation of American development, and the frontier interpretation of American development associated with Frederick Jackson Turner. Each view has exerted a pervasive influence on American thinking, but even Charles A. Beard had to admit that Turner's essay on the frontier had "a more profound influence on thought about American history than any other essay or volume ever written on the subject." Yet in time it became plain, as new research was brought to bear upon the problem, that the frontier theory, as a means of analyzing history, was not nearly precise enough. (Hofstadter, 1949)*

This would be considered plagiarism because the sentence structure is too close to the original passage. All of the ideas are expressed in basically the same tone, with only a few changes in grammar and phrasing. In this case, it would have been more honest to retain all of the original words and put the entire passage in quotes -- acknowledging an indebtedness to Hofstadter for the expression of his ideas and not just those ideas themselves.

One way to avoid this is to jot down the main ideas of the original passage in your own words, creating a list like this:

- *two main theories of American History*
- *Turner = frontier thesis*
- *Beard = economic interpretation of politics*
- *Turner was considered more influential -- even Beard admitted the fact*
- *recent research has undermined Turner's work*

Then try writing a paragraph without looking at the original. (...)

*In his 1949 essay "The Thesis disputed," Richard Hofstadter explains that there were two major currents of thought in historical writing about American development. He suggests that one of these, the "frontier thesis" associated with Frederick Jackson Turner, has been thought more influential than the other, the economic interpretation of politics associated with Charles A. Beard. He quotes Charles A. Beard admitting this fact to prove his point. Yet Hofstadter goes on to argue that Turner's frontier theory, influential as it may have been, has been undermined by more recent research developments. (Hofstadter, 1949)*

This paragraph more successfully translates Hofstadter's work into an original form of expression. Instead of just changing some words, this paragraph comes up with its own way of organizing and communicating the information. It also avoids plagiarism by clearly giving Hofstadter credit for his ideas. With just a little bit of work, then, you can turn a case of potential plagiarism into a perfect paraphrase!

### 3. Quoting

Quoting is the act of taking text word-for-word from the original source. Use quotes only if the material best expresses the point you want to make, and ensure that your quote is as short as possible. When you quote, don't forget to cite your source and use quotation marks! If you want to borrow ideas, you should paraphrase instead.

### 4. Other common problems

#### a) sloppy note-taking

- Make sure that in your notes you have a way to tell your ideas apart from the ideas you read in other people's work: use different coloured pens and write down what each colour corresponds to.
- Use the bibliography formats provided to keep track of your references, so that you know which idea came from which reference!

#### b) quoting facts

- Sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference between "common knowledge" facts – things you don't have to provide a reference for, and facts that require a reference. When in doubt always provide a reference for your source of information!

## **WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER**

Sometimes, when you do research you may have a difficult time deciding whether to cite a specific resource. It may be difficult to tell apart your own ideas from those of others, and you may have a difficult time knowing how to properly integrate someone else's work into your paper. To avoid situations that can potentially lead to plagiarism, use the checklist below.

### **When planning your paper:**

- ✓ Use the "Style Guide" to help you make proper bibliographical notes.
- ✓ Talk to your teacher if you are unsure whether something constitutes plagiarism.
- ✓ Come up with an original thesis statement (you can use the "How to Write a Thesis Statement" to help you out).
- ✓ Write a clear outline for your paper (use "Formulating an Outline for a Research Paper" to help you). In your outline you need to have a balance between your own ideas and those from other sources.
- ✓ Take good notes! When researching your topic use different-coloured pens to help you tell apart your own ideas from those of others. Don't forget to write page numbers for your sources and use the "Bibliography Worksheet" to help you record all the necessary information on the origins of your information.

### **When writing your paper**

- ✓ When in doubt, cite your sources. If you are unsure whether you should cite a source just do it!
- ✓ Use the "Style Guide" to help you cite properly.
- ✓ Be sure to clearly distinguish who said what, and give credit to that person.
- ✓ Learn how to paraphrase. Use the paraphrasing section above!
- ✓ Evaluate your sources. Not all web-based sources are worth using! Learn how to tell the good websites from the bad ones using the "Evaluating Electronic Sources" resource.

\* based on TURNITIN'S resources available through <http://www.plagiarism.org/>, accessed Dec.1, 2008.