

Academic Integrity

Using Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism

Excerpted with minor changes from *Quick Access Reference for Writers*, 2nd Canadian edition, Lynn Quitman Troyka, with the assistance of Cy Storm (Toronto: Pearson/Prentice-Hall, 2004).

To use sources well, you need to learn three skills. First, you need to incorporate others' words or ideas into your own papers accurately. Second, you need to do so effectively. And third, you need to do so honestly. This last skill is especially important in order to avoid plagiarism.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is presenting another person's words or ideas as if they were your own. Plagiarizing, like stealing, is a form of academic dishonesty or cheating. It's a serious offence that can be grounds for a failing grade or expulsion from a college or university. Beyond that, you're hurting yourself if you're plagiarizing, you're not learning.

You're most definitely plagiarizing if you turn in a paper that someone else has written. This is true whether the paper copies from a friend, another student, the library, the Internet, or elsewhere. You're plagiarizing whether someone has "given" you the paper, you've sounds it in a file or on the Internet, or you've bought it. Furthermore, changing parts of an existing paper doesn't make it your work...

Never assume that your instructor can't detect plagiarism. Instructors have a keen eye for writing styles that are different from those of students in general, and you in particular. Instructors can access Web sites that check your work against that of all online paper providers. Furthermore, sites exist that let instructors check your writing against hundreds of thousands of papers on the World Wide Web and the Internet. When instructors receive papers that they suspect contain plagiarized passages, they can also check with other professors who may have seen the paper.

YOU'RE PLAGIARIZING IF YOU

- Buy a paper from an Internet site, another student or writer, or any other source.

- Turn in any paper that someone else has written, whether the person has given it to you, you have downloaded it from the Internet, or you have copied it from any other source.
- Copy or paste into your paper any key terms, phrases, sentences, or longer passages from another source without correctly citing that source (that is, without indicating precisely what you have used and listing the source in your References or Works Cited).
- Use ideas from another source without correctly citing and documenting that source, even if you put the ideas into your own words.
- Combine ideas from many sources and pass them off as your own without correctly citing and documenting the sources.

How do I avoid Plagiarism?

The first step in avoiding plagiarism is to learn the techniques of quoting . . . , paraphrasing . . . , and summarizing . . . source materials. The second step is to master how to document sources correctly, according to the documentation style you're required to use. To do this, take advantage of the learning opportunities your instructor may build into research assignments. Many instructors require students to hand in a working bibliography . . . or annotated bibliography (a list of sources that contains a brief summary of or commentary on each source). Your instructor may ask to see your research log . . . , your working notes, copies of your sources, or working drafts of your paper. Not only do such practices help you to avoid plagiarism, they also help you to plan your research project . . . and move through the writing process.

How do I work with the Internet to avoid Plagiarism?

. . . the Internet can both greatly help researchers and create potential problems. One of those problems is plagiarism. You might be tempted to download a paper from the Internet. Don't. That kind of intellectual dishonesty can get you into real trouble.

Guidelines for avoiding Plagiarism

- Acknowledge when you're using the ideas or words of others. Always document the sources.
- Become thoroughly familiar with the documentation style your instructor requires you to use Then make a master list of the information you must provide when you QUOTE from, PARAPHRASE, or SUMMARIZE a source.

- Write down all facts that you need to document a source the first time you consult it.
- Follow a consistent note taking system. Use different colours of ink, or some other coding system, to distinguish three different types of material:
 1. quotations from a source
 2. material you have paraphrased or summarized from a source
 3. your own thoughts, triggered by what you have read or experienced
- Write clear, even oversized marks when you are quoting a passage directly. Make them stand out so that you can't miss them later.
- Consult your instructor if you're unsure about any phase of the documentation process.

What don't I have to Document?

You don't have to document common knowledge or your own thinking. Common knowledge is information that most education people know, although they might need to remind themselves of certain facts by looking them up in a reference book. For example, you would not need to document that

- Newfoundland entered Confederation in 1949
- Mercury is the planet closest to the sun
- The normal human body temperature is 37C
- All the oceans on our planet contain salt water

Guidelines for avoiding plagiarism on the Internet

- never cut material from an online source and paste it directly into your paper. You can too easily lose track of which material is your own and which comes from a source.
- Keep material that you downloaded or printed from the Internet in separate files from your own writing, whether you intend to quote from, summarize, or paraphrase the material. Be careful how you manage those files. When you know the exact place in your paper where you will use each passage, record that location clearly, using another colour or a much larger font. Just as important, make sure that you write down all the information you need to identify each source, according to the documentation style you need to use.
- Copy or paste downloaded or printed material into your paper only when you intend to use it as a direct quotation. Immediately place quotation marks around the material, or set off a long passage as a block quotation. Be sure to document the source at the same time as you copy or paste the

quotation into your paper. If you put off documenting the passage until later, you may forget to do it or use the wrong source.

- Summarize or paraphrase materials before you include them in your paper. If you have printed or downloaded Internet sources to separate files, don't copy directly from those files into your paper. Summarize or paraphrase the sources in a different file, and then paste the summaries or paraphrases into your paper. Document the source of each passage at the same time as you insert it in your paper. If you put off this task until later, you may forget to do it or get it wrong.
- Use an Internet service to check a passage you are not sure about. If you are concerned that you may have plagiarized by mistake, try submitting one or two sentences that concern you to a plagiarism-detection service. To do so, you must place quotation marks around the sentences when you type them into the search window. For-profit plagiarism-detection services charge a fee for checking your work, and they keep a copy of your paper in their databases.

Your own thinking is what you have concluded by building on what you already know. It consists of your analysis and interpretation of new material as you read or observe it. These thoughts of yours help you to formulate a thesis statement and organize your research paper. For example, suppose you're drawing on an article about the connections between emotions and logic in humans. While reading the article, you come to your own personal conclusion that computers don't have emotions. You don't need to find a source that supports this thought, although such a source might strengthen your assertion.

What should you document? Everything that you learn from a source, including ideas as well as specific language. Expressing the ideas of others in your own words doesn't release you from the obligation to tell exactly where you got those ideas, using correct documentation. Consider the following example:

Source:

Searle, John R. "I Married a Computer." Rev. of *The Age of Spiritual Machines* by Ray Kurzweil. *New York Review of Books* 8. Apr. 1999: 34+.

Original Material:

"We are now in the midst of a technological revolution that is full of surprises. No one thirty years ago was aware that one day household computers would become as common as dishwashers. And those of us who used the old Arpanet

of twenty years ago had no idea that it would evolve into the Internet" (37). [These are Searle's exact words.]

PLAGIARISM: The current technological revolution is surprising. Thirty years ago no one expected computers to be as common today as air conditioners. What once was the Arpanet has evolved into the Internet, and no one expected that. [Searle's ideas are being used without documentation.]

Note that even though the writer has changed some of Searle's wording, the ideas are virtually the same. Therefore, the writer is required to document Searle's review as the source.

CORRECT CITATION: John Searle states that we are in a surprising technological revolution in which computers have "become as common as dishwashers" (37). Twenty years ago no one could have predicted the Arpanet would become the Internet (Searle 37). [Quotation, paraphrase, and documentation are being used correctly.]

See also [Academic Integrity @ Queen's](#).