

PLAGIARISM: PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

The word *plagiarism* comes from a Latin word for ‘kidnapper’. Plagiarism means you are kidnapping or stealing someone else’s ideas or words and presenting them as if they were your own. If you copy an article from an encyclopedia and make some minor changes to pass it off as your own writing, you are plagiarizing deliberately. If you carelessly forget to include quotation marks or a reference to show whose words or ideas you are using, you are plagiarizing accidentally. Whether deliberate or accidental, plagiarism is a serious offence in scholarship.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating, and Georgia Perimeter College’s policy on cheating and academic dishonesty states, “Cheating of any kind may result in penalties ranging from a grade of ‘F’ or ‘0’ on the assignment to a course grade of ‘F’ ... [and] may include suspension or expulsion from Georgia Perimeter College.” The college’s Academic Honesty Policy can be found in the *Georgia Perimeter College Catalog* and in the *Georgia Perimeter College Student Handbook*. Students should always check with the course instructor for his or her specific guidelines on plagiarism and documentation. When outside sources are used for a class assignment, students must document the use of these sources according to the professor’s directions.

It is not plagiarism, however, to use other writers’ material when you acknowledge whose material it is. That procedure is a part of honest research writing. Avoid plagiarism by acknowledging sources when necessary and by using them accurately and fairly.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Quoted passages should be placed in quotation marks and their source referenced within the text (giving author, date and page number). A list of references at the end of the paper lists all the works referred to. Presenting material from other sources without **full** acknowledgment (plagiarism) is penalized heavily. This holds for both copying and paraphrasing of others’ work.

KNOWING WHAT TO ACKNOWLEDGE

When you write a research essay, you use information from three kinds of sources: (1) your independent thoughts and experiences; (2) common knowledge, the basic information people share; and (3) other people’s independent thoughts and experiences. Of the three, you must acknowledge only the third, the work of others.

YOUR INDEPENDENT MATERIAL

You need not acknowledge your own independent material—your thoughts, compilations of facts, or experimental results, expressed in your own words or format. However, someone else’s ideas and facts are not yours: even when they are expressed entirely in your words and format, they require acknowledgment.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE

Common knowledge consists of the standard information of a field of study, as well as folk literature and commonsense observations. Standard information includes, for instance, the major facts of history. The dates of Charlemagne’s rule as emperor of Rome (800-814) and the fact that his reign was accompanied by a revival of learning—both facts available in many reference books—do not need to be acknowledged, even if you have to look up the information.

Folk literature, which is popularly known and cannot be traced to particular writers, is considered common knowledge. This would include nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and any stories from the oral tradition of literature. Even if you read these things in printed form, documentation is not needed.

A commonsense observation, such as the idea that weather affects people's spirits does not require acknowledgment, but a scientist's findings about the effects of high humidity on people with blood pressure, will require acknowledgment.

You may use common knowledge as your own, even if you have to look it up in a reference book. You may not know, for example, the dates of the French Revolution or the standard definition of photosynthesis, although these are considered common knowledge. If you look them up in a dictionary or reference book, you do not need to acknowledge the source.

SOMEONE ELSE'S INDEPENDENT MATERIAL

Facts or ideas from signed or copyrighted sources require acknowledgment. The source may be a book, letter, magazine, newspaper, film, speech, interview, television program, or microfilmed document, but you must acknowledge not only the ideas or facts themselves but also the language and format in which they are presented. If you use a table or diagram created by another writer, acknowledge it just as you would his/her ideas.

QUOTING, SUMMARIZING AND PARAPHRASING

When writing a research essay, you can present the ideas of others either through direct quotation or summary or paraphrase, depending on your purpose.

For direct quotation, copy the material from the source carefully. Use quotation marks for even a single word if the original author used it in a special or central way. Do not change any wording, spelling, capitalization or punctuation. Use an ellipsis mark (three spaced full stops) to indicate the exact point at which you have deliberately left out part of a direct quotation. Use brackets to surround any word, comment, or punctuation mark you add within the quotation. Place the word (meaning 'in this manner') in square brackets immediately after any mistake in spelling, grammar, or common knowledge that your reader might otherwise believe to be a misquote. If the quoted material is four lines or less, place it in quotation marks within your running text. If it is longer than four lines, set it off from the text without quotation marks. Quotations of the latter sort should have an extra line space before and after the quote and all lines should be indented from the left.

When you summarize or paraphrase, you state in your own words and sentence structures the meaning of someone else's writing. Since the words and the sentence structures are yours, you do not use quotation marks, though, of course, you must acknowledge the author of the idea. If you use the original sentence pattern and substitute synonyms for key words or use the original words and change the sentence pattern, you are not paraphrasing but plagiarizing, even if the source is acknowledged because both methods use someone else's expression without quotation marks. In paraphrasing, it is crucial not only to use your own form of expression but also to represent the author's meaning without distorting it.

PLAGIARISM CHECKLIST

Review the following checklist before beginning to write your paper and again after you have completed your first draft.

- What type of source are you using: your own independent material, common knowledge, or someone else's independent material?
- If you are quoting someone else's material, is the quotation exact? Have you inserted quotation marks around quotations run into the text? Have you shown omissions with ellipses and additions with brackets?
- If you are paraphrasing or summarizing someone else's material, have you used your own words and sentence structures? Does your paraphrase or summary employ quotation marks when you resort to the author's exact language? Have you represented the author's meaning without distortion?
- Is each use of someone else's material acknowledged in your text? Are all your source citations complete and accurate?
- Does your list of works cited include all the sources you have drawn from in writing your paper?

**Plagiarism information from Fowler's The Little, Brown Handbook, 7th ed., Boston: Little, Brown, 1996: 578-84.*