



WRITING CENTER

Plagiarism

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WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s words or ideas, or those produced by generative AI, without giving credit to the original writer, speaker, or AI program. If you copy a text without giving credit or state the ideas in it as if they were your own, that is plagiarism. Even if you didn’t do it on purpose, it still counts as plagiarism. On the other hand, it is okay to state a fact that is considered common knowledge without giving credit (see below for more details about common knowledge).

WHY DO STUDENTS PLAGIARIZE?

There are several reasons that students plagiarize. Here are some of the most common.

- Running out of time to finish an assignment (plagiarism involving the use of generative AI is especially common in these cases)
- Feeling that one does not have anything to say
- Not understanding the professor’s assignment.
- Not knowing how to properly cite sources
- Not knowing how to paraphrase
- Being unwilling to put in effort



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WHY NOT PLAGIARIZE?

Plagiarism harms both you and others. It harms other people because their ideas and words are being used unfairly and without their permission. It harms you for several reasons.

- It could negatively impact your educational career, even leading to expulsion.
- It damages your personal integrity. Plagiarism amounts to lying because, if you do it, you are falsely claiming that someone else's work is your own.
- It hampers your learning. If you are taking someone else's words and not putting in the effort to write your own, you will not be able to improve your writing and critical thinking skills.

GENERATIVE AI: A SPECIAL CASE

In general, you should not use generative AI in your writing. Examples of AI programs include ChatGPT, Google Bard, and Grammarly Go, among others. However, some professors do allow students to use AI, and if that is the case, you are free to use it how your professor has directed. There are several reasons why you should not use AI unless your professor includes it as part of the assignment.

- AI programs are effectively plagiarism machines. They work by taking parts of texts found online and putting them together in new ways, usually without giving credit to their sources (and when they do cite a source, it is often incorrect).
- AI programs are often trained on datasets that contain private and/or copyrighted information, such as medical records and works of literature.
- AI programs can "hallucinate." They often make up fake information and produce untrustworthy results, which is a problem because part of academic integrity is the obligation to be as accurate as possible in your work. AI hallucinations could damage your reputation and make it hard for others to trust what you write.
- Using AI could hamper your learning by interfering with the development of your writing and critical thinking skills. If you use an AI to produce or correct a text, then you are missing out on the chance to practice good writing techniques that could be extremely useful in your future work and education.

AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

You can avoid plagiarism by giving credit to your sources and choosing not to use generative AI for any step of the writing process unless given permission to do so by your professor. To properly give credit, use either quotations or paraphrases, correctly cited, to develop and



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support your own original ideas. If given permission to use AI, make sure that you cite it as a source along with any human-written sources and fact-check any information it provides. To avoid plagiarism, there are several ways you can use your sources correctly.

QUOTATION

When using source material that you want to copy or quote exactly, place all the words from the original source inside a set of quotation marks (" "). Follow the quotation with an in-text citation in parentheses and put the author's name and all necessary publication information on the Works Cited or References page at the end of the paper. See other Writing Center handouts for details on exact requirements and formats for common citation styles, like [MLA](#) and [APA](#). Below are some examples in MLA style.

In-text: "Intentional plagiarizers cheat themselves" (Harris 17).

Works

Works Cited

Cited: Harris, Robert N. Using Sources Effectively: Strengthening Your Writing and Avoiding Plagiarism. 2nd ed., Pyrczak, 2002.

PARAPHRASE AND SUMMARY

Even if you don't directly quote someone else, if you use their ideas, it is important to paraphrase by putting the ideas into your own words and creating new sentence structures. Just as with a direct quote, you must also include an in-text citation and an entry on your Works Cited or References page. Below is an example of a proper paraphrase; it is correct because the writer has not only put Didion's ideas into new words, but has also expounded on her ideas and completely changed the structure of the sentence. Note how the incorrect example merely changes the order of a few words in the original, which is not enough to make it a real paraphrase.

Original text: "Grief, when it comes, is nothing we expect it to be" (Didion 26).

Proper paraphrase: Most, if not all, individuals are surprised by the emotions of grief; they have trouble anticipating what grief will feel like (Didion 26).



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Improper paraphrase: When grief comes, it's not what we expect it to be (Didion 26).

Summary is like a shorter version of paraphrasing and often covers an entire source. If you include the author and title of the source in your summary, do not need an in-text citation, but be sure to include an entry in your works cited or references page. See below for an example.

Summary: *The Lord of the Rings*, by J.R.R. Tolkien, is the story of Frodo Baggins and his quest to destroy the One Ring in the fires of Mount Doom.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE

As stated above, information that is considered common knowledge does not have to be cited. In general, anything that "everyone knows" is considered common knowledge. Examples include the name of the President of the United States, state capitols, the authors of famous works of literature, and so on. However, sometimes it can be difficult to be sure what does or does not count as common knowledge. Here are some example situations.

- I may know that John Wilkes Booth shot Abraham Lincoln, but I may not know the actual date or the place, so I look up those details in an encyclopedia. Do I have to document where I found the information?
- If in an essay about the growth of Johnson County I say that the population has more than tripled in the past twenty years, do I need to document that information?
- If I say the total headcount of the enrollment at Johnson County Community College in the fall of 2001 was 17,776, do I need to document this statistic?

The answer to all these questions is yes. A good rule of thumb is that you must document any facts and statistics that you look up in a reference. If you are not sure about your information and whether it is common knowledge or needs to be documented, ask yourself one question: Did I have to look up this information? If the answer is yes, you need to document it. If you are still not sure, err on the side of caution. It never hurts to cite a source.



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MORE TIPS FOR AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

- Plan ahead and give yourself plenty of time to work.
- If needed, ask your professor to extend the due date on the assignment.
- Visit the Writing Center and ask the tutors for help.
- Remember that it is *always* better to turn in unfinished work than to plagiarize. If you run out of time and can't get an extension on the due date, turn in your assignment as-is. That way, you will keep your personal integrity intact and avoid the trouble of being accused of plagiarism.