

# PLAGIARISM

## WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Plagiarism is the accidental or deliberate presentation of someone else's words, ideas, or information as your own. In a university, it is considered a serious form of academic dishonesty. Penalties for plagiarism can range from a lowered grade on the paper to expulsion from school.

## WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF PLAGIARISM?

Plagiarism occurs when

- you buy a term paper and hand it in as your own, or you have someone else write the paper for you;
- you copy portions of someone else's essay (whether from a classmate, a periodical article, or a web site) and pass them off as your own;
- you forget to put quotation marks around a passage you copied word for word from another source;
- you borrow ideas or statistics from another source and put them in your own words, but fail to make clear that you got the ideas or statistics from the source.

## WHY DO WE CREDIT SOURCES?

Academic writers give credit to sources for several reasons:

- Because academic readers often want to know how the ideas of the person they're reading agree with, disagree with, or modify the views of published experts in the field. An academic reader can often learn a lot about your thinking by knowing whom you've read, and whom you agree and disagree with. Professors often use phrases like "situate your views within the ongoing published conversation in the discipline" to describe this idea.
- Because academic readers sometimes want to know more about the subject. By citing your sources and listing them at the end of your paper, you allow a curious reader to look them up in a library or on the Internet.
- Because claims in academic writing are always subject to tests and proof. By listing the author of a quotation and providing a page number, you're telling the reader, "If you don't believe that this person really wrote this, you can look it up for yourself."
- Most of all, because it's the honest thing to do. If you copy word for word from an article by a professional writer but you don't give credit to that writer, you're claiming you yourself produced this professional-level writing. If you use the ideas of an expert on a subject but don't mention that you got the ideas from this expert, you're claiming that you yourself came up with these expert-level ideas. That's wrong.

## HOW DO I CREDIT SOURCES?

While there are a number of other guidelines, most of the issues involving giving proper credit can be summarized as follows:

- If you're copying the exact words from your source, enclose those words in quotation marks, and put the page number or numbers in parentheses after the quotation. Also, give the name of the author, either in your introduction to the quotation or in the parentheses afterward, along with the page number or numbers. (If the work you're quoting has no author listed, use the first few key words from the title instead.)
- If you're using your own words but relying on a source's ideas or statistics, give the author's name, either in your sentence or in parentheses at the end of the borrowed material. Also, if the ideas or statistics came from a specific page or a few pages, rather than being the central idea of an entire work, then give the page number or numbers in parentheses at the end of the passage containing the borrowed material.

The brief summary above leaves out certain complications: the fact that block quotations don't require quotation marks, or the fact that some sources (especially some of those you find electronically) don't have page numbers, for example. So for a more detailed discussion of how to give credit to sources properly, see the UWGB Writing Center's handouts on MLA Format, APA Format, and Quoting Within an Essay.

## SOME SPECIFIC CASES:

To make sure you understand the basic ideas about giving credit to sources, we've taken a sentence from a textbook and placed in the left-hand column four different ways of using that sentence in a research paper, with explanatory comments in the right-hand column.

First, here's the sentence, from page 315 of the fourth edition of a book called *Popular Writing in America*, by Donald McQuade and Robert Atwan:

“One reason readers respond so positively to a best selling novel is that it invariably reaffirms in easily accessible language its audience's attitudes, values, and collective fantasies and identifies reassuringly with its anxieties.”

At the end of the research paper should be a list of all the works used in the paper, including this listing for *Popular Writing in America* (in this case using MLA format):

McQuade, Donald, and Robert Atwan. *Popular Writing in America: The Interaction of Style and Audience*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Oxford, 1988.

Now, here are the four versions of the material from the sentence:

One reason readers respond so positively to a best selling novel is that it reaffirms in easily accessible language its audience's attitudes, values, and collective fantasies and identifies reassuringly with its anxieties.

Blatant plagiarism. The lack of a citation indicates that the student claims the *idea* as his or her own; the lack of quotation marks indicates the student claims the *wording* as his or her own. Many professors will fail a student for the course, not just give an F to the paper, if the student turns in a paper with many copied passages like this one.

Partly because best sellers always reaffirm their readers' shared fantasies, values, and attitudes, and because they identify reassuringly with readers' anxieties in easy-to-understand language, best sellers are responded to in a positive way by readers (McQuade and Atwan 315).

Still plagiarism, even with the citation at the end of the passage giving the authors' names and the page number. The student hasn't put the passage in his or her own words, but has merely pushed McQuade and Atwan's words around a little. If you quote, quote *exactly*, using quotation marks; if you put the ideas into your own words, make sure the words are distinctly your own. Again, if you turn in a paper with many passages like this one, you run the risk of receiving not just an F on the paper, but an F for the course.

The success of best sellers may be explained in part by the fact that such books are written in a straightforward style and share the “audience’s attitudes, values, and collective fantasies.” Such books also frequently soothe a reader’s anxieties (McQuade and Atwan 315).

As Donald McQuade and Robert Atwan point out, many best sellers are so successful because they offer support for the reader’s value system, indulgence for the reader’s fantasies, and a release for the reader’s anxieties (315).

No problem here. Most of the passage is in the student’s own words, and the part that isn’t in the student’s own words is copied exactly, with quotation marks. A citation is still needed, of course, since both the idea and part of the wording come from McQuade and Atwan. Normally the citation would come at the end of the quotation, but in this case the next sentence also borrows an idea from *Popular Writing in America*, and so the citation doesn’t come until after that sentence.

No problem. The student put things in his or her own words, and so no quotation marks are needed. But the authors’ names and the page number are still necessary, because the student borrowed the authors’ ideas. because the student’s sentence identifies the authors, their names don’t need to be listed again in the parenthetical citation, and so only the page number is put in parentheses.