

Definition of Plagiarism and Ways to Avoid It

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Plagiarism...The sound of this word makes students cringe with the instinctive fear of academic sanctions and disrepute it entails. But very few people know exactly what plagiarism means. In the broadest sense, it can be defined as taking credit for ideas or formulations that belong to others, whether accidentally or on purpose. The most obvious type of plagiarism is using someone's words verbatim without a proper citation (or any citation whatsoever). However, failure to paraphrase a source profoundly enough or to cite a paraphrased source can also be classified as plagiarism. The use of another student's work, commonly known as "cheating", is yet another disguise of this academic offense. Since plagiarism is viewed as a serious breach of academic ethics, it is important to know how to avoid it.

To be on the safe side when writing your academic papers, you should adhere to the following strategies. First, always use quotation marks when you put a direct quotation. Second, make sure you acknowledge the author of the formulations, as well as ideas, you use in your paper with properly formatted citations. You might retort that in our postmodern epoch there is hardly an idea that has not been voiced by someone at one time or another, but at least try to be honest with yourself and don't make them out as your own. Essentially, you need to cite any piece of information that is not common knowledge and that you haven't come up with on your own. Third, learn to paraphrase properly: copying a passage and sprinkling a few synonyms here and there is not acceptable; you need to recount the information accurately but with profound changes in sentence structure and wording. Four, use your own head and don't rely on your fellow students to write the paper for you.

While it may seem quite difficult to comply with all these rules if you are an aspiring writer, learning to write great papers with proper paraphrasing and formatting is a matter of practice, just like any other skill.