

What is Plagiarism

Many people think of plagiarism as copying another's work, or borrowing someone else's original ideas. But terms like "copying" and "borrowing" can disguise the seriousness of the offense:

According to the *Merriam-Webster OnLine Dictionary*, to "plagiarize" means

- 1) to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
- 2) to use (another's production) without crediting the source
- 3) to commit literary theft
- 4) to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

In other words, plagiarism is an act of *fraud*. It involves both **stealing** someone else's work and **lying** about it afterward.

But can words and ideas really be stolen?

According to U.S. law, the answer is yes. In the United States and many other countries, the expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property, and is protected by copyright laws, just like original inventions. Almost all forms of expression fall under copyright protection as long as they are recorded in some media (such as a book or a computer file).

All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not (see our section on "fair use" rules)

Attention! **Changing the words of an original source is *not* sufficient to prevent plagiarism.** If you have retained the essential idea of an original source, and have not cited it, then no matter how drastically you may have altered its context or presentation, *you have still plagiarized*

Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism.

Types of Plagiarism

Anyone who has written or graded a paper knows that plagiarism is not always a black-and-white issue. The boundary between plagiarism and research is often unclear. Learning to recognize the various forms of plagiarism, especially the more ambiguous ones, is an important step in the fight to prevent it.

I. SOURCES NOT CITED

1) "The Ghost Writer"

The writer turns in another's work, word-for-word, as his or her own.

2) "The Photocopy"

The writer copies significant portions of text straight from a single source, without alteration.

3) "The Potluck Paper"

The writer tries to disguise plagiarism by copying from several different sources, tweaking the sentences to make them fit together while retaining most of the original phrasing.

4) "The Poor Disguise"

Although the writer has retained the essential content of the source, he or she has altered the paper's appearance slightly by changing key words and phrases.

5) "The Labor of Laziness"

The writer takes the time to paraphrase most of the paper from other sources and make it all fit together, instead of spending the same effort on original work.

6) "The Self-Stealer"

The writer "borrows" generously from his or her previous work, violating policies concerning the expectation of originality adopted by most academic institutions.

II. SOURCES CITED (but still plagiarized!)

1) "The Forgotten Footnote"

The writer mentions an author's name for a source, but neglects to include specific information on the location of the material referenced. This often masks other forms of plagiarism by obscuring source locations.

2) "The Misinformer"

The writer provides inaccurate information regarding the sources, making it impossible to find them.

3) "The Too-Perfect Paraphrase"

The writer properly cites a source, but neglects to put in quotation marks text that has been copied word-for-word, or close to it. Although attributing the basic ideas to the source, the writer is falsely claiming original presentation and interpretation of the information.

4) "The Resourceful Citer"

The writer properly cites all sources, paraphrasing and using quotations appropriately. The catch? The paper contains almost no original work! It is sometimes difficult to spot this form of plagiarism because it looks like any other well-researched document.

5) "The Perfect Crime"

Well, we all know it doesn't exist. In this case, the writer properly quotes and cites sources in some places, but goes on to paraphrase other arguments from those sources without citation. This way, the writer tries to pass off the paraphrased material as his or her own analysis of the cited material.

FAQ

What is plagiarism?

Simply put, plagiarism is the use of another's original words or ideas as though they were your own. Any time you borrow from an original source and do not give proper credit, you have committed plagiarism and violated U.S. copyright laws. (See our [What is Plagiarism?](#) page for more detailed information on plagiarism.)

What are copyright laws?

Copyright laws exist to protect our intellectual property. They make it illegal to reproduce someone else's expression of ideas or information without permission. This can include music, images, written words, video, and a variety of other media.

At one time, a work was only protected by copyright if it included a copyright trademark (the © symbol). According to laws established in 1989, however, works are now copyright protected with or without the inclusion of this symbol.

Anyone who reproduces copyrighted material improperly can be prosecuted in a court of law. It does not matter if the form or content of the original has been altered – as long as any material can be shown to be substantially similar to the original, it may be considered a violation of the **Copyright Act**.

For information on how long a copyright lasts, see the section below on the [public domain](#).

Are all published works copyrighted?

Actually, no. The Copyright Act only protects works that express original ideas or information. For example, you could borrow liberally from the following without fear of plagiarism:

- Compilations of readily available information, such as the phone book
- Works published by the U.S. government
- Facts that are not the result of original research (such as the fact that there are fifty U.S. states, or that carrots contain Vitamin A)
- Works in the [public domain](#) (provided you cite properly)

Can facts be copyrighted?

Yes, in some situations. Any “facts” that have been published as the result of individual research are considered the intellectual property of the author.

Do I have to cite sources for every fact I use?

No. You do not have to cite sources for facts that are not the result of unique individual research. Facts that are readily available from numerous sources and generally known to the public are considered “common knowledge,” and are not protected by copyright laws. You can use these facts liberally in your paper without citing authors. If you are unsure whether or not a fact is common knowledge, you should probably cite your source just to be safe.

Does it matter how much was copied?

Not in determining whether or not plagiarism is a crime. If even the smallest part of a work is found to have been plagiarized, it is still considered a copyright violation, and its producer can be brought to trial. However, the amount that was copied probably will have a bearing on the severity of the sentence. A work that is almost

entirely plagiarized will almost certainly incur greater penalties than a work that only includes a small amount of plagiarized material.

But can't I use material if I cite the source?

You are allowed to borrow ideas or phrases from other sources provided you **cite them properly** and your usage is consistent with the guidelines set by fair use laws. As a rule, however, you should be careful about borrowing too liberally – if the case can be made that your work consists predominantly of someone else's words or ideas, you may still be susceptible to charges of plagiarism.

What are the punishments for plagiarism?

As with any wrongdoing, the degree of intent (see below) and the nature of the offense determine its status. When plagiarism takes place in an academic setting, it is most often handled by the individual instructors and the academic institution involved. If, however, the plagiarism involves money, prizes, or job placement, it constitutes a crime punishable in court.

Academic Punishments

Most colleges and universities have zero tolerance for plagiarists. In fact, academic standards of intellectual honesty are often more demanding than governmental copyright laws. If you have plagiarized a paper whose copyright has run out, for example, you are less likely to be treated with any more leniency than if you had plagiarized copyrighted material.

A plagiarized paper almost always results in failure for the assignment, frequently in failure for the course, and sometimes in expulsion.

Legal Punishments

Most cases of plagiarism are considered misdemeanors, punishable by fines of anywhere between \$100 and \$50,000 – and up to one year in jail.

Plagiarism can also be considered a felony under certain state and federal laws. For example, if a plagiarist copies and earns more than \$2,500 from copyrighted material, he or she may face up to \$250,000 in fines and up to ten years in jail.

Institutional Punishments

Most corporations and institutions will not tolerate any form of plagiarism. There have been a significant number of cases around the world where people have lost their jobs or been denied positions as a result of plagiarism.

Does intention matter?

Ignorance of the law is never an excuse. So even if you did not realize you were plagiarizing, you may still be found guilty. However, there are different punishments for *willful infringement*, or deliberate plagiarism, and *innocent infringement*, or accidental plagiarism. To distinguish between these, courts recognize what is called the *good faith* defense. If you can demonstrate, based on the amount you borrowed and the way you have incorporated it in your own work, that *reasonably* believed what you did was fair use, chances are that your sentence will be lessened substantially.

What is "fair use," anyway?

The United States government has established rough guidelines for determining the nature and amount of work that may be “borrowed” without explicit written consent.

These are called “fair use” laws, because they try to establish whether certain uses of original material are reasonable. The laws themselves are vague and complicated. Below we have condensed them into some rubrics you can apply to help determine the fairness of any given usage.

- **The nature of your use.**
 - If you have merely copied something, it is unlikely to be considered fair use. But if the material has been transformed in an original way through interpretation, analysis, etc., it is more likely to be considered “fair use.”
- **The amount you’ve used.**
 - The more you’ve “borrowed,” the less likely it is to be considered fair use. What percentage of your work is “borrowed” material? What percentage of the original did you use? The lower the better.
- **The effect of your use on the original**
 - If you are creating a work that competes with the original in its own market, and may do the original author economic harm, any substantial borrowing is unlikely to be considered fair use. The more the content of your work or its target audience differs from that of the original, the better.

We recommend the following sites for more information on “Fair Use” and Copyright laws.

<http://www.umuc.edu/library/copy.html>

http://www.sp.edu.sg/departments/asd/hk_1261.htm

What is the “public domain?”

Works that are no longer protected by copyright, or never have been, are considered “public domain.” This means that you may freely borrow material from these works without fear of plagiarism, provided you make proper attributions.

How do I know if something is public domain or not?

The terms and conditions under which works enter the public domain are a bit complicated. In general, anything published more than 75 years ago is now in the public domain. Works published after 1978 are protected for the lifetime of the author plus 70 years. The laws governing works published fewer than 75 years ago but before 1978 are more complicated, although generally copyright protection extended 28 years after publication plus 47 more years if the copyright was renewed, totaling 75 years from the publication date. If you are uncertain about whether or not a work is in the public domain, it is probably best to contact a lawyer or act under the assumption that it is still protected by copyright laws.

What is Citation?

A “citation” is the way you tell your readers that certain material in your work came from another source. It also gives your readers the information necessary to find that source again, including:

- information about the author
- the title of the work
- the name and location of the company that published your copy of the source
- the date your copy was published
- the page numbers of the material you are borrowing

Why should I cite sources?

Giving credit to the original author by citing sources is the only way to use other people’s work without plagiarizing. But there are a number of other reasons to cite sources:

- Citations are extremely helpful to anyone who wants to find out more about your ideas and where they came from.
- Not all sources are good or right – your own ideas may often be more accurate or interesting than those of your sources. Proper citation will keep you from taking the rap for someone else’s bad ideas.
- Citing sources shows the amount of research you’ve done.
- Citing sources strengthens your work by lending outside support to your ideas.

Doesn’t citing sources make my work seem less original?

Not at all. On the contrary, citing sources actually helps your reader distinguish your ideas from those of your sources. This will actually emphasize the originality of your own work.

When do I need to cite?

Whenever you borrow words or ideas, you need to acknowledge their source. The following situations almost always require citation:

- Whenever you use quotes
- Whenever you paraphrase
- Whenever you use an idea that someone else has already expressed
- Whenever you make specific reference to the work of another
- Whenever someone else’s work has been critical in developing your own ideas.

How do I cite sources?

This depends on what type of work you are writing, how you are using the borrowed material, and the expectations of your instructor.

First, you have to think about how you want to identify your sources. If your sources are very important to your ideas, you should mention the author and work in a sentence that introduces your citation. If, however, you are only citing the source to make a minor point, you may consider using parenthetical references, footnotes, or endnotes.

There are also different forms of citation for different disciplines. For example, when you cite sources in a psychology paper you would probably use a different form of citation than you might in a paper for an English class.

Finally, you should always consult your instructor to determine the form of citation appropriate for your paper. You can save a lot of time and energy simply by asking “How should I cite my sources,” or “What style of citation should I use?” before you begin writing.

In the following sections, we will take you step-by-step through some general guidelines for citing sources.

Identifying Sources in the Body of Your Paper

The first time you cite a source, it is almost always a good idea to mention its author(s), title, and genre (book, article, or web page, etc.). If the source is central to your work, you may want to introduce it in a separate sentence or two, summarizing its importance and main ideas. But often you can just tag this information onto the beginning or end of a sentence. For example, the following sentence puts information about the author and work before the quotation:

Milan Kundera, in his book The Art of the Novel, suggests that “if the novel should really disappear, it will do so not because it has exhausted its powers but because it exists in a world grown alien to it.”

You may also want to describe the authors if they are not famous, or if you have reason to believe your reader does not know them. You should say whether they are economic analysts, artists, physicists, etc. If you do not know anything about the authors, and cannot find any information, it is best to say where you found the source and why you believe it is credible and worth citing. For example,

In an essay presented at an Asian Studies conference held at Duke University, Sheldon Garon analyzes the relation of state, labor-unions, and small businesses in Japan between the 1950s and 1980s.

If you have already introduced the author and work from which you are citing, and you are obviously referring to the same work, you probably don't need to mention them again. However, if you have cited other sources and then go back to one you had cited earlier, it is a good idea to mention at least the author's name again (and the work if you have referred to more than one by this author) to avoid confusion.

Quoting Material

What is quoting?

Taking the exact words from an original source is called **quoting**. You should quote material when you believe the way the original author expresses an idea is the most effective means of communicating the point you want to make. If you want to borrow an idea from an author, but do not need his or her exact words, you should try paraphrasing instead of quoting.

How often should I quote?

Quote as infrequently as possible. You never want your essay to become a series of connected quotations, because that leaves little room for your own ideas. Most of the time, paraphrasing and summarizing your sources is sufficient (but remember that you still have to cite them!). If you think it's important to quote something, an excellent rule of thumb is that for every line you quote, you should have at least two lines analyzing it.

How do I incorporate quotations in my paper?

Most of the time, you can just identify a source and quote from it, as in the first example above. Sometimes, however, you will need to modify the words or format of the quotation in order to fit in your paper. Whenever you change the original words of your source, you must indicate that you have done so. Otherwise,

you would be claiming the original author used words that he or she did not use. But be careful not to change too many words! You could accidentally change the meaning of the quotation, and falsely claim the author said something they did not.

For example, let's say you want to quote from the following passage in an essay called "United Shareholders of America," by Jacob Weisberg:

"The citizen-investor serves his fellow citizens badly by his inclination to withdraw from the community. He tends to serve himself badly as well. He does so by focusing his pursuit of happiness on something that very seldom makes people happy in the way they expect it to."

When you quote, you generally want to be as concise as possible. Keep only the material that is strictly relevant to your own ideas. So here you would not want to quote the middle sentence, since it is repeated again in the more informative last sentence. However, just skipping it would not work – the final sentence would not make sense without it. So, you have to change the wording a little bit. In order to do so, you will need to use some **editing symbols**. Your quotation might end up looking like this:

In his essay, "United Shareholders of America," Jacob Weisberg insists that "The citizen-investor serves his fellow citizens badly by his inclination to withdraw from the community. He tends to serve himself badly. . . by focusing his pursuit of happiness on something that very seldom makes people happy in the way they expect it to."

The ellipses (. . .) indicate that you have skipped over some words in order to condense the passage. But even this version is still a bit lengthy – there is something else you can do to make it even more concise. Try changing the last sentence from

"He tends to serve himself badly. . . by focusing his pursuit of happiness on something that very seldom makes people happy in the way they expect it to."

to

"He tends to serve himself badly. . . by focusing his pursuit of happiness on [money]."

The brackets around the word [money] indicate that you have substituted that word for other words the author used. To make a substitution this important, however, you had better be sure that "money" is what the final phrase meant – if the author intentionally left it ambiguous, you would be significantly altering his meaning. That would make you guilty of fraudulent attribution. In this case, however, the paragraph following the one quoted explains that the author is referring to money, so it is okay.

As a general rule, it is okay to make minor grammatical and stylistic changes to make the quoted material fit in your paper, but it is not okay to significantly alter the structure of the material or its content.

Quoting within Quotes

When you have "embedded quotes," or quotations within quotations, you should switch from the normal quotation marks (") to *single* quotation marks (') to show the difference. For example, if an original passage by John Archer reads:

The Mountain Coyote has been described as a "wily" and "single-minded" predator by zoologist Ima Warner.

your quotation might look like this:

As John Archer explains, “The Mountain Coyote has been described as a ‘wily’ and ‘single-minded’ predator by zoologist Ima Warner.”

Note the double quotes surrounding the entire quotation, and the single quotes around the words quoted in the original.

How do I include long quotes in my paper?

The exact formatting requirements for long quotations differ depending on the citation style. In general, however, if you are quoting more than 3 lines of material, you should do the following:

- Change the font to one noticeably smaller (in a document that is mostly 12 point font, you should use a 10 point font, for example)
- Double indent the quotation – that means adjusting the left and right margins so that they are about one inch smaller than the main body of your paper.
- If you have this option in your word-processor, “left-justify” the text. That means make it so that each line begins in the same place, creating a straight line on the left side of the quotation, while the right side is jagged.
- Do NOT use quotation marks for the entire quotation – the graphic changes you have made already (changing the font, double indenting, etc.) are enough to indicate that the material is quoted. For quotations within that quotation, use normal quotation marks, not single ones.
- You might want to skip 1.5 times the line-spacing you are using in the document before you begin the quotation and after it. This is optional and depends on the style preferred by your instructor.

Listing References

What's a Bibliography?

A bibliography is a list of all of the sources you have used in the process of researching your work. In general, a bibliography should include:

- the authors' names
- the titles of the works
- the names and locations of the companies that published your copies of the sources
- the dates your copies were published
- relevant page numbers (optional)

Different kinds of sources, such as magazine articles and chapters in multi-author volumes, may require more specific information to help your reader locate the material.

Ok, so what's an *Annotated Bibliography*?

An annotated bibliography is the same as a bibliography with one important difference: in an annotated bibliography, the bibliographic information is followed by a brief description of the content, quality, and usefulness of the source.

What are Footnotes?

Footnotes are notes placed at the bottom of a page. They cite references or comment on a designated part of the text above it. For example, say you want to add an interesting comment to a sentence you have written, but the comment is not directly related to the argument of your paragraph. In this case, you could add the symbol for a footnote. Then, at the bottom of the page you could reprint the symbol and insert your comment. Here is an example:

This is an illustration of a footnote.¹ The number “1” at the end of the sentence corresponds to the note below. See how it fits in the body of the text?

¹ At the bottom of the page you can insert your comments about the sentence preceding the footnote.

When your reader comes across the footnote in the main text of your paper, he or she could look down at your comments right away, or else continue reading the paragraph and read your comments at the end. Because this makes it convenient for your reader, most citation styles require that you use either footnotes or endnotes in your paper. Some, however, allow you to make parenthetical references (author, date) in the body of your work.

Footnotes are not just for interesting comments, however. Sometimes, they simply refer to relevant sources. In other words, they let your reader know where certain material came from, or where they can look for other sources on the subject.

To decide whether you should cite your sources in footnotes or in the body of your paper, you should ask your instructor.

Where does the little footnote mark go?

Whenever possible, put the footnote at the end of a sentence, immediately following the period or whatever punctuation mark completes that sentence. Skip two spaces after the footnote before you begin the next sentence. If you must include the footnote in the middle of a sentence for the sake of clarity, or because the sentence has more than one footnote (try to avoid this!), try to put it at the end of the most relevant phrase, after a comma or other punctuation mark. Otherwise, put it right at the end of the most relevant word. If the footnote is not at the end of a sentence, skip only one space after it.

What's the difference between Footnotes and Endnotes?

The only real difference is placement – footnotes appear at the bottom of the relevant page, while endnotes all appear at the very end of your document. If your notes are very important, footnotes are more likely to get your reader's attention. Endnotes, on the other hand, are less intrusive and will not interrupt the flow of your paper.

If I cite sources in the footnotes (or endnotes), how's that different from a bibliography?

In footnotes or endnotes, you are citing sources that are directly relevant to specific passages in your paper. In a bibliography, you are citing all of the sources that you researched, whether they relate to any specific part of your paper or not. So your bibliography might contain “extra” sources which you read, but did not specifically cite in your paper. Also, citations in footnotes or endnotes will always have page numbers, referring to the specific passages relevant to that part of your paper, while citations in bibliographies may have none (if you read an entire book, for example, you would not have to list specific page numbers in your bibliography. If you quoted the book, however, you would have to mention the page numbers in your notes).

What are “works cited” and “works consulted” pages?

Sometimes you may be asked to include these – especially if you have used a parenthetical style of citation. A “works cited” page is a list of all the works from which you have borrowed material. Your reader may find this more convenient than footnotes or endnotes because he or she will not have to wade through all of the comments and other information in order to see the sources from which you drew your material. A “works consulted” page is a complement to a “works cited” page, listing *all* of the works you used, whether they were useful or not.

Isn't a “works consulted” page the same as a “bibliography,” then?

Well, yes. The title is different because “works consulted” pages are meant to complement “works cited” pages, and bibliographies may list other relevant sources in addition to those mentioned in footnotes or endnotes. Choosing to title your bibliography “Works Consulted” or “Selected Bibliography” may help specify the relevance of the sources listed.

For more information on documenting sources, see Purdue University's Online Writing Lab: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/index.html>

Citing Sources

Citation styles differ mostly in the location, order, and syntax of information about references. The number and diversity of citation styles reflect different priorities with respect to concision, readability, dates, authors, publications, and, of course, style.

There are also two major divisions *within* most citation styles: **documentary-note style** and **parenthetical style**. *Documentary-note style* is the standard form of documenting sources. It involves using either [footnotes](#) or [endnotes](#) so that information about your sources is readily available to your readers but does not interfere with their reading of your work.

In the *parenthetical style*, sometimes called the “author-date” style or “in-text” style, references to sources are made in the body of the work itself, through parentheses. An example of this would be the following sentence, taken from page 23 of a book written by Professor Scott in 1999:

Professor Scott asserts that “environmental reform in Alaska in the 1970s accelerated rapidly as the result of pipeline expansion.” (Scott 1999, 23)

This is generally considered an abbreviated form of citation, and it does not require footnotes or endnotes, although it does require the equivalent of a “[Works Cited](#)” page at the end of the paper. It is easier to write, but might interfere with how smoothly your work reads. See your instructor for information on which form, documentary-note style or parenthetical style, is appropriate for your paper.

With so many different citation styles, how do you know which one is right for your paper? First, we strongly recommend asking your instructor. There are several factors which go into determining the appropriate citation style, including discipline (priorities in an English class might differ from those of a Psychology class, for example), academic expectations (papers intended for publication might be subject to different standards than mid-term papers), the research aims of an assignment, and the individual preference of your instructor.

If you want to learn more about using a particular citation style, we have provided links to more specific resources below. Just choose the appropriate discipline from the menu on the left, or scroll down until you find the style that interests you. [Edited to include only APA for Cleary University faculty and students].

APA (American Psychological Association)

[if one of the below needs to be deleted, delete APA Style Guide]

- Writer’s Handbook: APA Style Documentation
<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocAPA.html>
- Bibliography Style Handbook (APA)
http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/bibliography_style_handbookapa.htm
- APA Style Electronic Format
<http://www.westwords.com/guffey/apa.html>
- Online! Guide to APA Style
<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/cite6.html>
- APA Style.org
<http://www.apastyle.org/elecref.html>

Preventing Plagiarism: Resources for Educators

The most important steps in preventing plagiarism are those taken to address its causes. The strategies in this section are intended as guidelines to help you:

- 1) become aware of the reasons plagiarism occurs
- 2) identify the different forms of plagiarism
- 3) integrate plagiarism education and prevention techniques into your courses

Why Students Plagiarize

There are many reasons students plagiarize. Sometimes deadlines come around more quickly than expected, sometimes assignments feel overwhelming, and sometimes the boundaries of plagiarism and research just get confused. But what situations are most likely to result in plagiarism? More importantly, how can they be avoided? Learning to identify the factors that make plagiarism an attractive alternative is the best way to stop it before it starts.

Intentional Plagiarism

Just like hacking into websites, plagiarizing papers can be something of a thrill in itself. For many students it becomes a question of ingenuity: “can I sneak a plagiarized paper past my professor?” But there is usually more behind intentional plagiarism than just the thrill of deception.

- Searching vs. Researching

Today’s students learn quickly that finding and manipulating data on the internet is a valuable skill. With the wealth of information available online, the production of original analysis and interpretation may seem like “busy work” compared to finding the best or most obscure sources.

Teach your students that the real skills they need to learn are interpretation and analysis – how to *process* the information they find. Tell them that anyone with some basic knowledge can *find* information on the internet – it’s what they *do* with that information that is important.

- “But their words are better”

Some students might think, “Why sweat over producing an analysis that has already been done better, by someone who knows more?” Students may also be intimidated by the quality of work found online, thinking their own work cannot compare.

Tell your students that what interests you most is seeing how *they* understand the assigned topic, and how they develop their own style and voice. This might go a long way toward making them feel more comfortable with writing. Explain to them that you know writing is a learning process, and that you do not expect them to be as brilliant as experts who have devoted years to the subject. You may also want to let them know that their experiences and the context of your class give them a unique perspective that may give them a far more interesting angle on the issues than those of the “experts.”

- Making the Grade

Students are under enormous pressure from family, peers, and instructors to compete for scholarships, admissions, and, of course, places in the job market. They often see education as a rung in the ladder to success, and not an active process valuable in itself. Because of this, students tend to focus on the end results of their research, rather than the skills they learn in doing it.

Explain to your students that while they may be able to hide ignorance of particular facts or theories, research and writing skills make themselves very apparent to anyone evaluating them. In other words, your students' grades won't matter if they don't have the skills to show for them.

Also, you may wish to emphasize improvement as a factor in grading, as this can encourage students to try developing their own abilities. This depends entirely upon your own pedagogical style, of course.

- “Everyone else is doing it”

Students often justify plagiarism by pointing out that since their peers plagiarize, they must do the same to keep up. They feel faced with a choice: put in several hours of work and risk a mediocre grade with less time for other subjects, or do what their peers do and copy something good from the internet for an easy A with time to spare.

One of the only ways to deal with this is by catching those students who do plagiarize. It takes a great deal of the pressure off of those who want to work honestly but are afraid of falling behind their peers.

- Poor Planning

Students are not always the best judges of how much time their assignments will take. They may not be aware of the extent of work involved in a research paper, or may simply be overwhelmed by the task and put it off until the last minute, leaving them with no time for original work of their own.

Scheduling stages of progress on their papers is a very effective way to deal with this. Having them submit bibliographies, outlines, thesis statements, or drafts on specified dates before the final draft is due will give them a good idea of the amount of work involved. It will also help them organize their time and make the task seem less overwhelming.

Unintentional Plagiarism

No honest student would walk out of a neighbors' house accidentally carrying their television. But even the most well-intentioned writers sometimes “appropriate” the work of others without proper authority. How does this happen?

- Citation Confusion

Perhaps the most common reason for inadvertent plagiarism is simply an ignorance of the proper forms of citation.

See our printable handout on [how to cite sources properly](#).

- Plagiarism vs. Paraphrasing

Many students have trouble knowing when they are paraphrasing and when they are plagiarizing. In an effort to make their work seem “more original” by “putting things in their own words,” students may often inadvertently plagiarize by changing the original too much or, sometimes, not enough.

Doing exercises in class where you hand out paraphrased and plagiarized passages in order to discuss the differences might be very helpful. Explain that your students must retain the essential ideas of the original, but significantly change the style and grammatical structure to fit in the context of their argument.

- “I was just copying my notes”

Students often mix their own ideas and those of their sources when they take sloppy notes, creating confusion when they begin writing their papers.

It may be worthwhile to go over some note-taking methods with your students. Teaching them to document their sources using different colored pens and “post-it” tabs to mark pages, for example, will save time and keep references clear.

- “I couldn’t find the source”

Students are often sloppy about writing down the bibliographic information of their sources, leaving them unable to properly attribute information when it comes to writing the paper.

Explain how important it is to keep careful track of references during the note-taking stage. Students may be eager to focus entirely on the content of their research, and need to be told that how they handle their reference material is a significant part of the assignment. Having them turn in bibliographies before they turn in the paper itself will also encourage them to pay more attention to their sources.

- “I thought we didn’t have to quote facts”

Because the internet makes information so readily available, students may find it difficult to tell the difference between “common knowledge” they are free to use, and original ideas which are the intellectual property of others.

The easiest thing to do is teach your students the maxim, “When in doubt, cite sources.” You can also refer them to our [student guide](#), or go over the difference between material that must be cited and material they are free to use in your class.

- Confusion about expectations

Students may not be aware of what proper research requires. They may think they are being asked simply to report critical commentary, or to “borrow” from a number of sources to show that they have “done their homework.” In either case, it becomes a problem if what they turn in tends to be predominantly the work of others.

One of the most common sources of confusion is the ambiguity of terms such as “analyze” and “discuss.” You should explain to your students that these words have specific meanings in academic discourse, and that they imply a degree of original thought that goes beyond mere “reporting.” Emphasizing your interest in their own ideas will also help them understand what you expect from them.

Cultural Perspectives on Plagiarism

Not all cultures take the same view of plagiarism. The Western notion that “ideas” can be the property of individuals may actually seem absurd to those with different views on what constitutes shared information or public discourse. Students from cultures which have a more collective sense of identity, for example, may have a difficult time understanding the distinctions some cultures draw between individual and public property. You might spend some very productive class time discussing your students’ perspectives on this issue.

Guidelines for Plagiarism Prevention

I. Explain what “plagiarism” means

Of course, most students will tell you they already know what plagiarism means. But do they really understand the difference between a legitimate paraphrase and a plagiarized one? Or between a proper citation and an improper one? Spending some time during the beginning of the course to explain plagiarism may go a long way toward preventing future problems.

You may also wish to distribute examples of plagiarism and legitimate citation, and then go over the differences together. This will clarify some of the common misconceptions about plagiarism and reduce the likelihood of “honest mistakes,” while at the same time showing how serious you are about the issue. Finally, you can direct your students to our website, where they can take a [quiz](#) on the difference between plagiarism and legitimate citation.

II. Explain what’s Wrong about Plagiarism

Without instruction, it may be hard for your students to understand the seriousness of plagiarism. Their response is often: “How can copying some words actually hurt anyone?” But the reality is that plagiarism is an act of fraud that involves both stealing (another’s intellectual property) and lying (implying that the work is one’s own). This undermines the principles of trust and respect that make education possible. But when they plagiarize, students hurt more than just their instructors and the person from whom they steal. They also hurt themselves, because they fail to acquire the research, analytic, and writing skills that they would have learned by doing the assignment honestly. Finally, plagiarism also victimizes those classmates who have legitimately earned their grades and degrees, and who will be competing with the plagiarizer for school admissions and jobs.

III. Make the Consequences Clear

Students often do not know just what they risk when they plagiarize. Begin your course by establishing a clear policy on plagiarism. Give very specific information about the penalties involved. You may want to create a specific policy for your courses in addition to your institution’s general policy. Try telling your students, for example, that any case of plagiarism will result in immediate failure of the paper, and that a second instance will result in failure of the course and possibly expulsion, will doubtless make them think twice about it. Be sure to cite your policy on any research assignments as a reminder

IV. Start off with Clear Expectations

First, let your students know you expect them to produce thoughtful, original work. Students are often under the illusion that the goal of their assignments is to collect the best information possible. Explain to them that while good research is critical, you are even more interested in their ability to transform the information they find into an original and persuasive argument than in their ability to come up with the most or best sources. The skills they learn in working to further the ideas and arguments of others are a valuable part of what they will take away from their assignments. Knowing this may help them understand the value of original work.

You may also want to establish some rules in advance: Should your students collaborate? Will you require separate “works cited” pages and bibliographies? How many sources will they be required to consult? How many sources will they have to include in their paper? Will online sources be sufficient, or would you like your students to find printed material as well? Starting off with clear guidelines will prevent most of the confusion that leads to unintentional plagiarism, and allow no excuses for the intentional kind.

V. Assign Specific Questions or Topics

Provide a list of topics or questions that you would like your students to address in their papers. The more particular the questions, the less likely that your students will find papers already written on them. If you worry that lists like this restrict your students' creative freedom, you might want to add an option that allows your students to develop their own topics in consultation with you or a teaching assistant.

VI. Require Students to Submit Thesis Statements, Introductions, Outlines, or Drafts

One of the best ways to ensure that your students' work is original is to check it during the process of composition. Since rough drafts, etc., are not as readily available for copying as finished papers, the simple fact that they have to submit one will encourage most of your students to produce original work. It often takes more work to forge these materials than it does to produce them originally. Also, if you have time to comment on what they submit, you can monitor how they respond to your feedback and whether their papers show the flexibility of works-in-progress.

VII. Have your students Annotate their Bibliographies

Ask your students to summarize the content and usefulness of their sources in a few sentences. Be sure to tell them that copying library abstracts or blurbs from the backs of books is not permissible. Emphasize that the annotation has to be in their own voice and words, and should specifically discuss the relevance of the source to their research. This exercise should take no time at all for students who have done their work honestly. Plagiarizers, however, will find it considerably more difficult.

VIII. Assign Oral Presentations

Have your students answer questions about the process of researching and developing their ideas. This is also an excellent opportunity to ask them specific questions about their papers, and to bring up passages that seem suspicious. Questions like "This quotation here is a little unclear. Could you tell me a little more about the article from which you got it?" can be very effective in determining how much work the student did without offending or seeming suspicious.

IX. Require Recent and Printed Sources

Most papers from online paper mills and other cheating databases are already several years old at best. Having your students integrate at least one contemporary source in their paper will keep your students up to date on the issues and help ensure legitimate research and work.

X. Assign a Paragraph on the Composition Process

If you do not have your students give oral presentations or turn in drafts during the composition process, you may want to have them submit a paragraph explaining how they arrived at their topic, how they began researching it, what criteria they used for evaluating their sources, and what they learned from the research project. This will give you an idea of how well they have comprehended the material and the degree of fluency they have in speaking about it.

XI. Encourage Concision

Students often try to "fill space" by "borrowing" material once they have finished with their own ideas. Tell your students that it is very obvious when they "pad" their papers to fill up page requirements. Encourage them to be as concise as possible, focusing on the substance of their claims rather than the length of their writing. Make sure they know the trick to writing a long research paper lies in coming up with a thesis or argument which requires the assigned number of pages to develop, and not in drawing out the points they make or citing multiple sources to prove a single idea.

Important Terms

Attribution	<p>The acknowledgement that something came from another source.</p> <p>The following sentence properly <i>attributes</i> an idea to its original author: Jack Bauer, in his article “Twenty-Four Reasons not to Plagiarize,” maintains that cases of plagiarists being expelled by academic institutions have risen dramatically in recent years due to an increasing awareness on the part of educators.</p>
Bibliography	A list of sources used in preparing a work
Citation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) A short, formal indication of the source of information or quoted material.2) The act of quoting material or the material quoted.
Cite	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) to indicate a source of information or quoted material in a short, formal note.2) to quote3) to ascribe something to a source
Common Knowledge	<p>Information that is readily available from a number of sources, or so well-known that its sources do not have to be cited.</p> <p>The fact that carrots are a source of Vitamin A is common knowledge, and you could include this information in your work without attributing it to a source. However, any information regarding the effects of Vitamin A on the human body are likely to be the products of original research and would have to be cited.</p>
Copyright	A law protecting the intellectual property of individuals, giving them exclusive rights over the distribution and reproduction of that material.
Endnotes	Notes at the end of a paper acknowledging sources and providing additional references or information.
Facts	<p>Knowledge or information based on real, observable occurrences.</p> <p>Just because something is a fact does not mean it is not the result of original thought, analysis, or research. Facts can be considered intellectual property as well. If you discover a fact that is not widely known nor readily found in several other places, you should cite the source.</p>
Footnotes	Notes at the bottom of a paper acknowledging sources or providing additional references or information.
Fair Use	The guidelines for deciding whether the use of a source is permissible or constitutes a copyright infringement.
Intellectual Property	A product of the intellect, such as an expressed idea or concept, that has commercial value

Notation	The form of a citation; the system by which one refers to cited sources.
Original	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Not derived from anything else, new and unique 2) Markedly departing from previous practice 3) The first, preceding all others in time 4) The source from which copies are made
Paraphrase	<p>A restatement of a text or passage in other words</p> <p>It is extremely important to note that changing a few words from an original source does NOT qualify as paraphrasing. A paraphrase must make significant changes in the style and voice of the original <i>while retaining the essential ideas</i>. If you change the ideas, then you are not paraphrasing – you are misrepresenting the ideas of the original, which could lead to serious trouble. (see examples in the students preventing page....)</p>
Peer Review	Turnitin.com's teaching tool that allows students to anonymously review the work of their peers. This gives students a chance to build critical skills while helping them to see the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing.
Plagiarism	The reproduction or appropriation of someone else's work without proper attribution; passing off as one's own the work of someone else
Public Domain	<p>The absence of copyright protection; belonging to the public so that anyone may copy or borrow from it.</p> <p>See our section on What is public domain?</p>
Quotation	Using words from another source
Self-plagiarism	Copying material you have previously produced and passing it off as a new production. This can potentially violate copyright protection, if the work has been published, and is banned by most academic policies.