

AVOIDING PLAGIARISM: TIPS FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY

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INTRODUCTION

In my many years of teaching, I have found that many people have no concept of what constitutes plagiarism. They do not know how to paraphrase or how to credit the original authors for their ideas and work. So I developed this guide for students and distributed it in my courses (along with an APA guide): these guides have been required reading at the beginning of each semester in every course I taught. Students let me know that these guides were a valuable resource.

Faculty, too, found these materials helpful. An earlier version of this plagiarism guide eventually became a part of the my college's Student Handbook; faculty members from other schools (taking classes from me) also asked permission to use this guide in their courses. If you would like to use this in your courses, please do, but please email me at cathy@nursingeducationexpert.com just to let me know you are using it - I'd like to keep track of where this is being used. If you want to add information specific to your school (e.g., the Academic Honesty policy, consequences of plagiarism, etc.), email me and I'll send you the Word file.

Ok, so let's get to it! There are many sources and references on the subject of plagiarism - so there was no sense in me reinventing the wheel. However, I did see a need to collate the best "rules" and tips I found into one document. This eGuide is the result of that effort.

The contents include the following sections:

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WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Plagiarizing by accident or because of ignorance is not an excuse. So let's be clear about what it is:

Plagiarism is taking someone else's work and acknowledging it as your own.

- If you copy material verbatim and do not put quotes or cite - this is plagiarism.
- If you have paraphrased information and have not cited the source after your paraphrase- this is plagiarism. (Because there is no source credited, the reader will assume these are your own thoughts.)
- If you have borrowed ideas from a source, but fail to credit the originator - this is plagiarism.
- From a source: if you've just rearranged words, used a synonym to substitute for a word, or left some words out, thinking that this is legitimate paraphrasing - you are wrong. This is plagiarism.
- If you copy content and cite, *but do not put quotes around it** - this is plagiarism (because the reader thinks you paraphrased the information into your own words, because there are no quotes). (*of less than 40 words using APA format; Keep in mind formatting of quotes related to number of words copied, etc. vary according to reference style used.)
- If you identify *anyone's* work (e.g., another student's paper) as your own - this is plagiarism.
- If you have/hire someone else write your assignments - this is plagiarism.
- If you reuse papers from another course without asking permission of the instructor, this is self-plagiarism.

Sources include: "published works (books, magazines, newspapers, websites, plays, movies, photos, paintings, and textbooks) and unpublished sources (class lectures or notes, handouts, speeches, other students' papers, or material from a research service) (University of California, Davis [UCD], 2006, ¶ 4).

Harris (2012) defined plagiarism as:

Using another person's words or ideas without giving credit to the other person. When you use someone else's words, you must put quotation marks around them and give the writer or speaker credit by revealing the source in a citation. Even if you revise or paraphrase the words of someone else or just use their ideas, you still must give the author credit in a note. Not giving due credit to the creator of an idea or writing is very much like lying. (Point 3, Strategies of Awareness)

Plagiarism can be considered *intentional* or *unintentional* - but either way, it is a violation. The University of California Davis (2006) defined intentional and unintentional plagiarism this way:

Intentional plagiarism is *deliberate* copying or use of another's work without credit. You know what you are doing.

Unintentional plagiarism can result from not knowing citation standards ("Isn't information from the Internet free?"), from sloppy research and poor note-taking, or from careless "cutting and pasting" of electronic sources. (UCD, 2006, section How Can You Avoid Plagiarism, ¶ 1)

WHY DO FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS CARE IF HEALTHCARE STUDENTS PLAGIARIZE?

- You are not learning what you need to learn for your clinical and professional role (and therefore can't provide the vigilance and care you should to protect your patients).
- Plagiarism constitutes lying and fraud. Your character comes into question.
- The credibility and the reputation of the University or Journal, as a whole, are threatened.
- When you plagiarize you are being deceitful. As healthcare providers, we hold the public's respect and trust. Dishonest students threaten that credibility and trust. Because the provider's integrity and respect for others is the basis of an effective patient-provider relationship, Health Sciences students, in general, are expected to conform to personal and professional ethics codes. Each of the health science disciplines has published ethics codes for their members. Every university and individual school of nursing, medicine, pharmacy, etc., has an ethics code and/or policy and procedure related to student academic and honor code issues, as well.

When you plagiarize you: (Harris, 2012; UCD, 2006)

- Show disrespect for your faculty, fellow students, and education in general
- Are being dishonest
- Are violating the Honor Code you signed when admitted to the University and School
- Cheat yourself:
 - Miss the benefit of truly understanding and learning content that is deemed important for your professional education
 - Neglect skills that will benefit you in your clinical and professional career

My instructor (or editor) won't know...

- Oh yes, they will. Many times it is pretty clear to faculty when you've plagiarized material. Some faculty members may ask you to submit the articles you've used for your papers. You can expect faculty to check your paper against your sources.
- Faculty **know** about the paper mills, Internet sources for papers, tricks of the trade, etc. Many now use resources to find plagiarized papers using computer search engines and plagiarism detection software.
- Oh, and by the way, a paper that is *completely* assembled using cut-and-pasted quotes and paraphrases from your sources - is not considered your own work! This would be a paper that is a collection of other people's work. So make sure you have your own thoughts interspersed throughout your assignments or articles.

BOTTOM LINE...

Plagiarism is **WRONG**, it is **CHEATING, LYING, STEALING, FRAUD**, and it will not be tolerated by your faculty or your professional peers.

HOW NOT TO PLAGIARIZE: KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is when you use your own words to restate someone else's ideas or thoughts and then cite the author(s) to credit them for their original ideas. In order to paraphrase correctly you must read the material, understand the point of the material, and be able to capture the author's thoughts in your own words.

Paraphrasing *is not*:

- Changing a few words and copying the rest
- Changing words that alter the meaning of the original sentence (That means you are using words you don't really understand the meaning of and therefore that you don't understand the author's message or points.)
- Reversing the sentence order or flipping a clause
- Using the author's unique phrasing or manner of expression
- Adding your own thoughts to the paraphrase

Some sources add this point: Paraphrasing is not

- Using the author's sentence structure or patterns (this is an area of controversy - I've read other sources that specifically define paraphrasing as putting the author's ideas in your own words, *in their order*, with appropriate cites.) So, I don't think there is a definitive answer on this particular "rule." So, FYI.

Paraphrasing Examples

Original Material:

"Impaired ability of the left ventricle affects both systolic and diastolic function. When the left ventricle is unable to contract adequately to eject blood, cardiac output drops along with the heart's ability to deliver oxygen to the tissues. Because not all blood is ejected with each beat, blood remains within the ventricle after systole. This increase in end-systolic volume impairs left ventricular filling during diastole" (Holcolmb, 2002, p. 232).

Plagiarized material:

Impaired ability of the left ventricle affects both systolic and diastolic function. Cardiac output drops along with the heart's ability to deliver oxygen to the tissues when the left ventricle is unable to contract adequately to eject blood. Because not all blood is ejected with each beat, blood remains within the ventricle after systole. This increase in end-systolic volume impairs left ventricular filling during diastole.

Why is this Plagiarism?

- Author's exact words used without quotes and a citation to indicate quoted material
- Flipped the clause in the second sentence - but these are still the author's words!



Original Material:

"Impaired ability of the left ventricle affects both systolic and diastolic function. When the left ventricle is unable to contract adequately to eject blood, cardiac output drops along with the heart's ability to deliver oxygen to the tissues. Because not all blood is ejected with each beat, blood remains within the ventricle after systole. This increase in end-systolic volume impairs left ventricular filling during diastole" (Holcomb, 2002, p. 232).

Plagiarized material:

The **inability** of the left ventricle to **contract** affects both systolic and diastolic function. The heart's ability to deliver oxygen to the tissues is **decreased** when the left ventricle is unable to contract adequately, **causing** cardiac output to **drop**. After systole, **the** blood remains within the ventricle. This **rise** in end-systolic **capacity** impairs left ventricular filling during diastole.

Why is this Plagiarism?

- Author's exact words used with only **minor changes** made to sentences (noted in **bold**)
 - **This is called the Mosaic or Patchwork Plagiarism**
- Flipped the clause with wording changes in the second sentence.
- Flipped the clause with wording changes in the third sentence.
- Left out a few words in third sentence - but otherwise exact wording used.
- The change in the word "increase" in third sentence to "rise," and "volume" to "capacity" does not accurately convey the point that the increased blood volume is what is causing the ESV to increase. The word substitutions in this case do not have the same meaning as the original sentence.
- No citation

Accurate paraphrase: Example 1

The heart's ability to transport blood and nutrients to the tissues is dependent on its ability to contract adequately. Poor contractile function of the left ventricle will result in an excess of blood in the left ventricle causing a decrease in ejection fraction, stroke volume, and therefore cardiac output. The excess left ventricular blood volume inhibits the capacity of the left ventricle to accept more blood during diastole (Holcomb, 2002).

Why is this not plagiarism?

- The author's ideas are accurately conveyed, but the student used their own words.
- Citation to credit the author is included.
 - No quote marks needed because the material is paraphrased.
 - No page number needed because material is not quoted.

Accurate Paraphrase and Quote: Example 2

Holcomb (2002) stated that the heart's ability to transport blood and nutrients to the tissues is dependent on its ability to contract adequately: "When the left ventricle is unable to contract adequately to eject blood, cardiac output drops along with the heart's ability to deliver oxygen to the tissues" (p. 232). Blood not ejected due to poor left ventricular function will overload the heart causing a decrease in the ability of the left ventricle to accept more blood.

Why is this not plagiarism?

- The author's ideas are accurately conveyed in the student's paraphrase and cited.
- There is an indication of where the student copied material - the author's exact words are copied *exactly* and surrounded with quotes and a page # noted in the citation. The full citation of Author, year, page # is not needed at the end of the paragraph because the paragraph started with the citation of the author and year. The implication is that the entire section is referring to this Holcomb reference.

WHAT DOES *NOT* HAVE TO BE CITED?

Facts or information that is considered "common knowledge" or "shared language" do not have to be cited. Common knowledge is "generally known information" or "facts that can be found in numerous places and are likely to be known by a lot of people" (Indiana University, 2011). I'll acknowledge though, that deciding what common knowledge is may be harder than it sounds!

The University of Wisconsin-Madison (2003) provided this definition of "shared language":

In every discipline and in certain genres (such as the empirical research report), some phrases are so specialized or conventional that you can't paraphrase them except by wordy and awkward circumlocutions that would be less familiar (and thus less readable) to the audience. When you repeat such phrases, you're not stealing the unique phrasing of an individual writer but using a common vocabulary shared by a community of scholars. (¶ 10, 11)

So words that are common, "precise, economical, and conventional designations" (The University of Wisconsin-Madison [UWM], 2003, ¶ 9) within the nursing profession (for example, "critical care, staff nurses, nurse manager, clinical nurse specialist, nurse clinician, resource nurse"; ¶ 8), are considered shared language and do not need to be quoted. These words can be used in paraphrases without penalty, *unless they are part of a unique sentence structure or "within a longer borrowed phrase" ¶ 9).*

Examples:

George W. Bush is the 43rd president of the United States. This is common knowledge

The Earth is the third planet from the sun. This is common knowledge.

The heart has four chambers. This is common knowledge for the healthcare disciplines.

You don't have to cite 'common knowledge,' **BUT** the fact must really **be** commonly known. That Abraham Lincoln was the U.S. President during the Civil War **is** common knowledge; that over 51,000 Union and Confederate soldiers died in the Battle of Gettysburg⁴ is **not**. (UCD, 2001, section Guidelines for Avoiding Plagiarism, Point 5).

From the 2001 UCD document: ⁴"The Battle of Gettysburg: Aftermath," Gettysburg Convention & Visitor's Bureau, September 22, 1999,

<http://www.gettysburg.com/visitor/booklet/bat/aftermath.htm>

THE FINE PRINT: CONSEQUENCES

In general, healthcare professionals are expected to follow to their discipline's and profession's codes of personal and professional ethics.

Most colleges have a statement or policy related to Academic Honesty, Academic Integrity, or Ethics. Violations of the policies are usually clearly spelled out.

Multiple consequences can be applied for students caught plagiarizing.

- Disciplinary probation
- Recommendations for counseling
- Suspension
- Expulsion (Dismissal)

Keep in mind that there are no rules that require an institution to start with probation for a first offense. Immediate dismissal from the program or college would be a hard lesson to learn.

When writing for publication, authors are also held to a professional standard.

Plagiarism software is used by editors of professional journals, too. If a journal has published an article that turns out to be plagiarized, they usually alert the readership in the next issue. This would be an embarrassment for the author(s). A damaged academic and professional reputation is more long-lasting consequence: authors can be banned or blacklisted from publishing. Legal issues and monetary judgments are also possible (<http://www.ithenticate.com/resources/6-consequences-of-plagiarism>).



TIPS TO HELP YOU AVOID PLAGIARIZING

- Be knowledgeable: know what it is and how to avoid it. You've heard the adage: "Ignorance of the law is no defense" - the same is true for plagiarism
- Be *really careful when taking notes* to identify when you are directly quoting from the author - get in a habit of putting quotes around the note, page #, all bibliographic material needed for the full citation, etc. Trust me: you *really* won't remember that you were going to change that sentence, idea, etc.
 - Create a system that works for you. I've always used a system where I bracket my own words or thoughts to be sure I remember that these are mine versus the author's in my notes - even if it's only a few words. I do it all the time now - so it has become a habit.
 - Write the quote, with quotes, *exactly* as written, with punctuation, etc. Even if words are spelled wrong or have a foreign spelling (e.g., paediatric vs. pediatric. See your reference manual for how to acknowledge these issues). Remember you can always paraphrase the quote later - but write it right the first time so there is no confusion in your mind when you go back to put your paper together.
 - A couple of my sources noted a process similar to one I use to avoid plagiarism. When writing the piece, I close my eyes and restate the material/ideas, etc. and then check with the source to make sure I really am putting the ideas in my own words - then I make sure I put the citation with it!
- If you feel you have to use the author's exact words - then quote or block quote (as appropriate) and cite correctly. FYI- Many faculty would rather you paraphrase and not have a paper full of quotes - see my earlier note about cut-and-pasted submissions.
- Don't paraphrase using the author's unique sentence structure or "pattern of ideas" without citing (UWM, 2003).
- If you are not sure whether to cite or not, be safe and not sorry - CITE.
- Get the instructor's permission if you submit your own paper from a previous class for an assignment in a current class (University of Northern British Columbia, 2012). This is called self-plagiarism! (Harris, 2012).

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