



Is It Or Is It Not Plagiarism?

Tips and Examples for Writing in Communication Sciences and Disorders

Developed by the department faculty – August 2003

“Plagiarism” is a fancy word that means presenting as your own original work something that is not your own original work. It can refer to words, grammatical or thematic structures, and content. One can plagiarize from a formally published written source (e.g., a book or a journal article), from an informally available written source (e.g., a paper your friend wrote last year), or from an unwritten source (e.g., a lecture). Under some definitions, including those used by the Vice President for Instruction of the University of Georgia, you can even plagiarize from yourself, if you turn in for course credit something that you wrote earlier for credit in a previous course without acknowledging that the source of your current paper is a previously existing paper (see http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/academic_honesty/academic_honesty.htm). Plagiarism and the related issues of graduate-level or professional-level writing discussed in this document are relevant for any and all writing you will do as a student and as a professional: tests, take-home projects, papers, clinic reports, etc.

Avoiding Intentional Plagiarism

Intentional plagiarism is easy to avoid: Don’t knowingly copy anything, refer to anything, or use anything, even as “background material,” without appropriately crediting the source – and make sure you know what “appropriately crediting the source” means. If you didn’t make it up completely on your own, out of the clear blue sky and with only your very own thoughts as your only inspiration, it probably needs to be referenced. If it includes two or more words that another author had used, in the same order that the other author used them, it probably needs to be in quotation marks with a page number provided – and sometimes even one particular word, characteristic of another author’s point or position, might need to be treated as a quote. You are certainly allowed (and expected) to refer to, and depend on, the previous writings of other authors; you are just not allowed to re-print their writing as if it were yours. Their previous efforts must be appropriately used and specifically credited in your writing.

Avoiding Unintentional Plagiarism

Unintentional plagiarism is more difficult to avoid, because authors (including students) are often unaware of the extent to which their own writing is being shaped by things they have read or heard. There are several ways to guard against unintentional plagiarism.

1. Do not use on-line or electronic sources, such as journal articles, while you are writing. If you find on-line resources while you are doing your research, print them and use the printed copies as you are writing. The issue here is that it’s all too easy to just “cut and paste” substantial portions of text on the theory that you will “change” it later, and then end up losing track of what you copied and what you wrote yourself -- and then

you've just illegally and unethically plagiarized by including a direct copy of somebody else's writing within your writing. Cutting and pasting more than one or two words from an on-line source might be plagiarism – and if those one or two words were important enough that you had to copy them, and you don't acknowledge your source appropriately, even those one or two words might be plagiarism.

2. If you take notes while you are doing the initial research for a paper, either always take all your notes as direct quotes from your sources or develop a foolproof system for yourself of being absolutely sure when your notes are copied directly from your source and when your notes are your own summaries of what you read.

Unintentional plagiarism often occurs when notes were direct quotes and you assume that they were your own summary (see Landau, 2003; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002)

3. Watch your computer screen or your hands while you are writing. If you are looking at a book or a journal article or any other printed source while you are typing or writing, you are probably following it too closely.

4. Quote. Quoting means to copy another author's exact words and to give that author a specific kind of credit in your writing. Precisely how to give the author what specific kind of credit varies according to different referencing systems, but you cannot go wrong in speech-language pathology using the systems of the American Psychological Association ("APA-style" references). In APA style, if you repeat in your own writing a phrase, sentence, or more from another author, you must enclose the relevant words in quotation marks (or print them with an indented margin, for long quotes) and provide a specific page number along with a reference to the work. In other words, "when quoting, always provide the author, year, and specific page citation in the text, and include a complete reference in the reference list" (American Psychological Association, 2001, p. 117). If anybody reading your paper could put it alongside any other source and match up the two word for word, for more than just a word or two, then all the places where your writing is a copy of the other writing must be enclosed in quotation marks with page numbers provided.

Quoting is an acceptable but not preferred method of avoiding plagiarism. It does make it clear that you are not the original source of what you are saying, but it does not make it clear what you know or what you think as distinct from what the original author knows or thinks. It does little more than re-print material that is already available in the original. In general, quotes should be used sparingly, reserved for the case where you have a specific reason for wanting to use precisely the same words that a previous author has already used.

5. Paraphrase. Paraphrase means to re-write what you understand another author to have said, using your own structure, emphasis, style, and wording, and also to cite that the original idea came from that other author. There are several examples of appropriate and inappropriate paraphrasing below; please note that appropriate paraphrasing involves substantially more than swapping out a few synonyms here and there. Appropriate paraphrasing is a common, acceptable, and useful means of avoiding plagiarism. It combines the strength of previous sources with your own unique style or emphasis.

6. Integrate. Integrating means to combine ideas from several sources in your own unique way, using citations to those sources to support parts of your argument but not because those sources provide the whole of your argument. Integration is the preferred way to avoid plagiarism, because if you are truly writing an integrative piece

then the theme, content, and organization of your paper will be yours alone, and they will necessarily be very different from the theme, content, and organization of any single one of your sources. Integration also represents the goal or the scholarly ideal for any writing: that you as an author can take multiple ideas and combine them in a new way that shows your own unique understanding not only of a single source but of a set of related sources.

Examples

The remainder of this document includes several examples of acceptable and unacceptable paraphrasing. They are all based on the following passage from an article by Rodekohr and Haynes (2001):

Research into the area of African American English (AAE) has led to a heightened awareness of the need for culturally unbiased assessment procedures. This awareness is based on the knowledge that AAE is a legitimate dialect with roots that can be traced back to African languages, coupled with knowledge that most standardized language tests do not reflect the validity of AAE in their scoring methods. (p. 256)

(Note the format for extended or block quotations!)

Read the following examples and indicate if they are acceptable or unacceptable paraphrases of the original text.

Example 1

Research into the area of African American English (AAE) has led to a heightened awareness of the need for culturally unbiased assessment procedures. This awareness is based on the knowledge that AAE is a legitimate dialect with roots that can be traced back to African languages, coupled with knowledge that most standardized language tests do not reflect the validity of AAE in their scoring methods.

This is an unacceptable paraphrase. Why? It is a verbatim copy of the original text, and the writer does not use proper citation (i.e., quotation marks, names of authors, or page numbers). Either one of these reasons would make this example unacceptable; this is a clear example of presenting Rodekohr and Haynes' work as if it were yours. Please also note that even if this extended quotation had been properly marked and cited as a quote it would still be very poor professional or graduate-level writing, subject to receiving a relatively low grade in many cases, because it would still be nothing but a direct copy of something that Rodekohr and Haynes had already written. Graduate and professional writing does not copy previous texts; instead, your writing should explain, expand on, or integrate the information that you understand from texts, lectures, discussions, etc.

Example 2

Studies in the area of African American English (AAE) have led to an increased awareness of the need for culturally unbiased assessment measures. The knowledge that standardized tests do not appropriately assess AAE in their scoring systems and the fact that AAE is an authentic dialect with roots that can be traced to African languages has led to this awareness.

This is also unacceptable but a common mistake. This is still considered plagiarism for two reasons. First, the writer has only rearranged parts of the original paragraph and changed one or two words from the original text. Secondly, the writer has not used proper citations. Again, either one of these reasons makes this passage plagiarism; this is still presenting something that is essentially Rodekohr and Haynes' (2001) writing without giving them any credit for their work. Even with a citation to Rodekohr and Haynes this paragraph would remain problematic, for the same reasons discussed above for Example 1; compare Example 2 with the original and look for all the places where the words are the same and should be in quotation marks, and notice also that its basic syntactic structure and overall message are both the same as in the original.

Example 3

Standardized language tests are invalid (Rodekohr & Haynes, 2001). Children who speak AAE need to have their African roots traced if we are to assess their language in a culturally unbiased way (Rodekohr & Haynes, 2001).

This example is not plagiarism, because the ideas were paraphrased and appropriate citations are provided, but its content is incorrect -- and bordering on nonsensical. This is inappropriate as professional or graduate-level writing because it reflects a very poor understanding of Rodekohr and Haynes' main points, as well as a very poor understanding of several other ideas.

Example 4

There is growing interest in examining issues of cultural diversity, particularly African American English (AAE). This increase has been attributed to the fact that African American English has been historically linked to African languages, thereby documenting its standing as a dialect, and the realization that many standardized speech and language tests do not appropriately account for dialectal differences in their scoring systems (Rodekohr & Haynes, 2001).

This passage is acceptable because the writer has paraphrased the original text into his or her own words AND provides appropriate citation for the ideas within the passage. Without the citation, this passage would be unacceptable.

Example 5

Rodekohr and Haynes (2001) also claimed that current attempts to develop and use culturally fair language assessments can be traced to knowledge gained from basic research about AAE. Flintstone and Rubble (2002) disagreed, arguing that the current emphasis on “reasonable accommodation” (p. 123) is not different from a historic pattern of seeking to develop valid and reliable assessment instruments in many fields. It appears that Flintstone and Rubble hold the minority view in this case, however; most sources agree in linking a growing understanding of AAE as a dialect and a growing appreciation for culturally fair language assessments (see, e.g., Keller-Bell, 2003; Smith, Jones, & Johnson, 1999; Zebra et al., 2002).

This passage is not only acceptable but exemplary. The writer incorporated the ideas presented by Rodekohr and Haynes into a context of her own, using their ideas as support for hers and giving them credit for their ideas. She also combined and integrated information from several sources, which is a mark of scholarly writing and complete understanding. When she did feel the need to use precisely the words that a source had used (from the Flintstone and Rubble paper) she put those words inside quotation marks and identified them as coming from a specific page in Flintstone and Rubble’s paper.

References (real ones only!)

American Psychological Association (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). American Psychological Association: Washington, DC.

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Rodekohr, R. K., & Haynes, W. O. (2001). Differentiating dialect from disorder: A comparison of two processing tasks and a standardized language test. *Journal of Communication Disorders, 34*, 255-272.

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Acknowledgment

The examples of paraphrasing in this document were originally developed by Yolanda Keller-Bell.