Lesson Proper for Week 9

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is defined as the act of claiming the words or ideas of another person as your own. Plagiarism is a serious violation of the ethical standards of academic writing, and most colleges and universities have strict penalties, including academic probation or expulsion, for students who are guilty of plagiarism. Most schools publish an official code of student conduct (sometimes called an academic integrity policy), and you should be familiar with these guidelines and how they apply to your research and writing.

Students who knowingly copy whole passages from outside sources into their work without documentation are committing the most blatant form of plagiarism. Unintentional plagiarism, however, is still a violation of academic integrity. Unacknowledged use of another person's sentences, phrases, or terminology is plagiarism, so provide a citation and use quotation marks to show exactly where you are drawing on others' work. Similarly, unacknowledged use of another person's ideas, research, or approach is also plagiarism, so write careful paraphrases. Review the checklist in Chapter 1 (page 23) for guidelines to help avoid unintentional plagiarism.

USING SOURCES TO ENHANCE YOUR CREDIBILITY

Research is something you need to share, not hide. What some students fail to realize is that citing a source in their papers, even the short ones, signals something special and positive to your readers—that you have researched the topic, explored the literature about it, and have the talent to share it. Research writing exercises your critical thinking and your ability to collect ideas. You will discuss not only the subject matter, such as the degradation of prairie soil resources, but also the *literature* of the topic, such as articles from the Internet and current periodicals found at your library's databases. By announcing clearly the name of a source, you reveal the scope of your reading and thus your credibility, as in this student's notes:

According to Mathers and Rodriguez, soil erosion reduces soil productivity through losses of nutrients, water storage capacity, and organic matter.

Dumanski and others report that the estimated annual costs of erosion across the Great Plains "lie in the range of 155–177 million dollars in the case of water and between 213–271 million dollars in the case of wind" (208).

"A new water era has begun," declares Postel (24).

She indicates that the great prairies of the world will dry up, including America's. When Americans notice the drought, perhaps something will happen.

These notes, if transferred into the paper, will enable readers to identify the sources used. The notes give clear evidence of the writer's investigation into the subject, and they enhance the student's image as a researcher. You will get credit for displaying the sources properly. The opposite, plagiarism, presents the information as though it were your own:

The great prairies of the world will soon dry up, and that includes America's, so a new water era has begun.

That sentence borrows too much. If in doubt, cite the source and place it within its proper context.

PLACING YOUR WORK IN ITS PROPER CONTEXT

Your sources will reflect all kinds of special interests, even biases, so you need to position them within your paper as reliable sources. If you must use a biased or questionable source, tell your readers up front. For example, if you are writing about the dangers of cigarette smoke, you will find different opinions in a farmer's magazine, a health and fitness magazine, and a trade journal sponsored by a tobacco company. You owe it to your readers to scrutinize Internet sites closely and examine printed articles for:

- Special interests that might color the report
- Lack of credentials
- An unsponsored website
- Opinionated speculation especially that found on blogs and in chat rooms
- Trade magazines that promote special interests
- Extremely liberal or extremely conservative positions

Here's an example: Norman Berkowitz, in researching articles on the world's water supply, found an article of interest but positioned it with a description of the source, as shown in this note

Earth First, which describes itself as a radical environmental journal, features articles by an editorial staff that uses pseudonyms, such as Sky,

Jade, Wedge, and Sprig. In his article "The End of Lake Powell," Sprig says, "The Colorado River may soon be unable to provide for the 25 million people plumbed into its system" (25). The danger, however, is not limited to Lake Powell. Sprig adds, "This overconsumption of water, compounded with a regional drought cycle of 25 years, could

mean that Lake Powell and ever y other reservoir in the upper Colorado River area will be without water" (24–25).

Not only does Berkowitz recognize the source with name, quotation marks, and page numbers, he identifies the nature of the magazine for his readers.

UNDERSTANDING COPYRIGHT

The principle behind copyright law is relatively simple. Copyright begins at the time a creative work is recorded in some tangible form—a written document, a drawing, a video recording. It does not depend on a legal registration with the copyright office in Washington, DC, although published works *are* usually registered. Thus, the moment you express yourself creatively on paper, in song, on a canvas, that expression is your intellectual property. You have a vested interest in any profits made from the distribution of the work. For that reason, songwriters, cartoonists, fiction writers, and other artists guard their work and do not want it disseminated without compensation.

Copyright law in the social networking context remains in flux because of rapid advancements and changes in online technology. The recent attempt to prevent the downloading of music onto private computers is a demonstration of this concern. The ease with which Internet users are able to distribute copyrighted information has dramatically increased the prevalence of copyright infringement. However, it is important for the student researcher to distinguish his or her classroom efforts from profit-generating websites.

Scholarly writing is not a profitmaking profession, but the writers certainly deserve recognition. We can give that recognition by providing in-text citations and bibliography entries. As a student, you may use copyrighted material in your research paper under a doctrine of *fair use* as described in the U.S. Code, which says:

The fair use of a copyrighted work . . . for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research is not an infringement of copyright.

AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

There are a number of steps you can take to avoid plagiarizing. First, develop personal notes full of your own ideas on a topic. Discover how you feel about the issue. Then, rather than copy sources one after another onto your pages of text, try to express your own ideas while synthesizing the ideas of the authorities by using summary, paraphrase, or direct quotation, which are explained fully on pages 154–166. Rethink and reconsider ideas gathered during your reading, make meaningful connections, and, when you refer to the ideas or exact words of a source—as you inevitably will—give the other writer full credit.

To repeat, *plagiarism* is offering the words or ideas of another person as one's own. Major violations, which can bring failure in the course or expulsion from school, are:

- The use of another student's work
- The purchase of a "canned" research paper
- Copying whole passages into a paper without documentation

· Copying a key, well-worded phrase into a paper without documentation

· Putting specific ideas of others into your own words without documentation

· Inadequate or missing citation

· Missing quotation marks

· Incomplete or missing Works Cited entry

Whether deliberate or not, these instances all constitute forms of plagiarism.

Unintentional plagiarism is often a result of carelessness. For example:

· The writer fails to enclose quoted material within quotation marks, yet he or she provides an in-text citation with name and page number.

· The writer's paraphrase never quite becomes paraphrase—too much of the original is left intact—but he or she provides a full citation to name and page.

CHECKLIST

Documenting Your Sources

· Let the reader know when you begin borrowing from a source by introducing the quotation or paraphrase with the name of the authority.

· Enclose within quotation marks all quoted materials—both key phrases and sentences.

· Use an indented block for quotations of four lines or more.

· Make certain that paraphrased material has been rewritten in your own style and language. The simple rearrangement of sentence patterns is unacceptable.

· Provide specific in-text documentation for each borrowed item, but keep in mind that styles differ for MLA, APA, CSE, and CMS standards.

· Provide a bibliography entry in the Works Cited for every source cited in the paper, including sources that appear only in content footnotes or an appendix.

In these situations, instructors must step in and help the beginning researcher, for although these cases are not flagrant instances of plagiarism, they can mar an otherwise fine piece of research.

Common Knowledge

You do not need to document information that is considered "common knowledge." But how do you know what is or is not common knowledge? Use the following criteria to determine whether or not a particular piece of information can be considered common knowledge.

1. Local knowledge. You and your reader might share local or regional knowledge on a subject. For example, if you attend Northern Illinois University, you need not cite the fact that Illinois is known as the Land of Lincoln, that Chicago is its largest city, or that Springfield is the capital city. Information of this sort requires *no* in-text citation, as shown in the following example.

The flat rolling hills of Illinois form part of the great Midwestern Corn Belt. It stretches from its border with Wisconsin in the north to the Kentucky border in the south. Its political center is Springfield in the center of the state, but its industrial and commercial center is Chicago, that great boisterous city camped on the shores of Lake Michigan.

However, most writers would probably want to document the following passage:

Early Indian tribes on the plains called themselves *Illiniwek* (which meant strong men), and French settlers pronounced the name *Illinois* (Angle 44).

2. Shared experiences. Coursework and lectures will give you and members of your class a similar perspective on the subject. For example, students in a literary class studying African-American writers would share common information, so the student might write, without documentation, something like this:

Langston Hughes, an important poet in the 1920s and 1930s, became a leader of the Harlem Renaissance, and like so many writers, he took great pride in his African-American heritage. He was not afraid to use the vernacular black dialect, and I would say that he is one of the fathers of today's rap music. If the student shifts to non-general information, then a citation is in order: Hughes has been described by Gerald Early as the major artistic link between the revolutionary poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar and the radical poet Amiri Baraka (246).

3. Common Facts. Common factual information that one might find in an almanac, fact book, or dictionary need not be cited. Here is an example:

As an American "Founding Father," John Adams was a statesman, diplomat, and leading advocate of American independence from Great Britain. A lawyer and public figure in Boston, Adams was as a delegate from Massachusetts to the Continental Congress. He assisted Thomas Jefferson in drafting the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and served as its primary advocate in the Congress.

The preceding passage needs no documentation; however, when specific incidents are added, the more likely will be the need for documentation. Of course, provide a citation for analysis that goes beyond common facts.

CHECKLIST

Common Knowledge That Does Not Need to Be Documented

· Do not document the source if an intelligent person would and should know the information, given the context of both writer and audience.

· Do not document terminology and information from a classroom environment that have become common knowledge to all members of the class.

· Do not document the source if you knew the information without reading it in an article or book.

· Do not document almanac-type information, such as date, place of birth, occupation, and so on.

· Do not document information that has become general knowledge by being reported repeatedly in many different sources (i.e., Michael Jordan holds several National Basketball Association [NBA] scoring records).

The achievements of John Adams have received greater recognition in modern times, though his contributions were not initially as celebrated as those of the other Founding Fathers (Hixson 86).

CORRECTLY BORROWING FROM A SOURCE

The next examples in MLA style demonstrate the differences between accurate use of a source and the dark shades of plagiarism. First is the original reference material; it is followed by the student versions that use the passage, along with discussions of their failures and merits.

Original Material:

Cyber-attacks are the new normal. It seems each week a news outlet reports yet another high-profile data breach affecting businesses and consumers. Even so, many companies fail to realize the severity of the threat. In fact, a recent report from the Federation of European Risk Management Associations (FERMA) reveals that, surprisingly, only 16% of companies have designated a chief information security officer to oversee cyber-risk and privacy, and less than half have a strategy for communicating a cyber-risk incident to the public. The report, "Meeting the Cyber Risk Challenge," reveals another disturbing statistic: Companies are failing to purchase coverage for a cyber-attack. Only 19% of respondents claimed they have purchased security and privacy insurance designed to cover exposures associated with information security and privacy issues. But preparing is about more than just insurance.

—Holbrook, Emily. "Cyber what?" *Risk Management,* (Mar. 2013): 45. *Academic OneFile.* Web. 26 Mar. 2013.

Student Version A: A case of rank plagiarism that is ethically and morally wrong:

A recent report from the Federation of European Risk Management Associations (FERMA) reveals that, surprisingly, only 16% of companies have designated a chief information security officer to oversee cyber risk and privacy, and less than half have a strategy for communicating a cyber-risk incident to the public. The report, "Meeting the Cyber Risk Challenge," reveals another disturbing statistic: Companies are failing to purchase coverage for a cyber-attack. Only 19% of respondents claimed they have purchased security and privacy insurance designed to cover exposures associated with information security and privacy issues. But preparing is about more than just insurance.

This passage reads well, and the unsuspecting reader will probably think so as well. However, the writer has borrowed almost the whole passage from Holbrook, so it is plagiarism of the first order. The writer implies to the reader that these sentences are an original creation when, in fact, the sentences are actually stolen from a source.

Student Version B: Plagiarism that steals the ideas directly from a source:

Cyber-attacks have become a normal occurrence in our society as data breaches affecting businesses and consumers occur each week. Far too few companies have a chief information security officer to oversee cyber-risk and privacy; moreover, most have no plan or strategy for communicating a cyber-risk incident to the public.

This version borrows extensively from the original with paraphrasing and reworking key phrases and clauses. The writer has stolen the main ideas of the original without credit of any sort. The words might belong to the student writer, but the ideas belong to Holbrook.

Student Version C: Plagiarism that paraphrases improperly and offers a vague citation:

As reported by multiple news outlets, cyber-attacks in which a data breach affects businesses and consumers have become commonplace in modern society. Few companies realize the severity of the threat. Most companies do not have a designated chief information security officer to oversee cyber-risk and privacy, nor do they have a strategy for communicating a cyber-risk incident to the public (Holbrook 45).

This version is somewhat better. It provides a reference to Holbrook, but readers cannot know that the paraphrase contains far too much of Holbrook's language—words that should be enclosed within quotation marks. Also, the citation to Holbrook is ambiguous; when does the borrowing begin? The next version handles these matters in a better fashion.

Student Version D: An acceptable version with a proper citation to a block quotation:

According to Emily Holbrook, "each week news outlets report yet another high-profile data breach affecting businesses and consumers" (45). Sadly, cyber-attacks have become the norm in the new millennium: A recent report from the Federation of European Risk Management Associations (FERMA) reveals that, surprisingly, only 16% of companies have designated a chief information security officer to oversee cyber-risk and privacy, and less than half have a strategy for communicating a cyber-risk incident to the public. (Holbrook 45)

This version represents a satisfactory handling of the source material. The source is acknowledged at the outset of the borrowing, the passage has been quoted as a block of material, and a page citation closes the material. Let's suppose, however, that the writer does not want to quote an entire passage. The following example shows a paraphrased version.

Student Version E: An acceptable version with a citation to the source:

Cyber-risk attacks have become the norm in the new millennium. According to Emily Holbrook, editor of Risk Management magazine, Companies are failing to purchase coverage for a cyber-attack. Only 19% of respondents claimed they have purchased security and privacy insurance designed to cover exposures associated with information security and privacy issues" (45).

This version also represents a satisfactory handling of the source material. In this case, a direct quotation is employed, the author and the authority are acknowledged and credited, and an introduction presented in the student's own language precedes Holbrook's ideas.

SHARING CREDIT IN COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

Joint authorship is seldom a problem in collaborative writing, especially if each member of the project understands his or her role. Normally, all members of the team receive equal credit. However, it might serve you well to predetermine certain issues with your peer group and the instructor:

- How will the project be judged and grades awarded?
- Will all members receive the same grade?
- Can a nonperformer be dismissed from the group?
- Should each member write a section of the work and everybody edit the whole?
- Should certain members write the draft and other members edit and publish it to the Web?
- Can the group work together via e-mail rather than meeting frequently for group sessions?

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