

Plagiarism

AN ETHICAL ANALYSIS OF A SCENARIO INVOLVING PLAGIARISM APPEARS IN SECTION 2.6.2. This appendix provides a much more complete picture of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

Consequences of Plagiarism

According to the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA), “plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source” [1]. The consequences of plagiarism can be severe. Newspaper reporters and college professors have lost their jobs because they plagiarized the work of others [2, 3]. Colleges and universities view plagiarism as a form of cheating. A few years ago at the University of Virginia, 48 students either quit or were expelled for plagiarism [4].

The vast amount of information freely available on the Internet, the power of search engines, and the cut-and-paste capability of contemporary computer programs have made it easier than ever to commit plagiarism. Of course, Web search engines can also make it easy for teachers to detect plagiarism [5].

Types of Plagiarism

You are plagiarizing if you deliberately do any of the following:

- Copy the words of another without both (1) putting the copied text in quotation marks and (2) citing the source
- Paraphrase the words of another without citing the source
- Incorporate the figures or drawings of another person without crediting the source
- Include facts that are not common knowledge without citing the source
- Use another person’s ideas or theories without giving that person credit

Guidelines for Citing Sources

Common knowledge means information that is available in many places and known to a large number of people. For example, it is common knowledge that Delaware was the first state to ratify the United States Constitution. You do not have to cite a source when presenting common knowledge.

However, you *should* cite a source when you present facts that are not common knowledge. For example, it is not common knowledge that the percentage of college freshmen in the United States interested in majoring in computer science dropped by more than 60 percent between 2000 and 2004 [6].

You must cite a source if you present another person’s interpretation of the facts, whether or not you acknowledge the person by name. For example, Cass Sunstein argues that information technology may weaken democracy by allowing people to filter out news that contradicts their view of the world [7]. If you repeat someone else’s idea, you must cite where you found it.

How to Avoid Plagiarism

Always put quotation marks around text you have obtained from another source, and write down enough information about the source that you can cite it properly. Do this when you are collecting your notes, so that when you are writing your paper, you will not forget that the words are a direct quotation or whom you are quoting.

When you are paraphrasing the work of another, read over the material, then put it aside before you begin writing. That will help ensure you are using your own words to express the ideas. Check your paraphrase against the source document. Make sure you have not distorted the original meaning. Whenever you have used a phrase from another person's work, you must put the phrase in quotation marks. Always cite the source of the ideas you are paraphrasing, even if there are no direct quotations.

Finally, remember to cite the sources of illustrations and figures that you reproduce.

Misuse of Sources

The WPA definition of plagiarism emphasizes that it is the *deliberate* attempt to conceal the source of the words or ideas. This aligns with our definition of ethics as being focused on the *voluntary* moral choices people make. If a person has no intention of deceiving, but fails to cite sources or use quotation marks correctly, that person's actions constitute misuse of sources.

Additional Information

For more information, read "Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices", which is the principal source document for this appendix [1].

References

- [1] Council of Writing Program Administrators. *Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices*, January, 2003. www.wpacouncil.org.
- [2] "Corrections." *The New York Times*, May 2, 2003.
- [3] Scott Smallwood. "Arts Professor at New School U. Resigns after Admitting Plagiarism" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 20, 2004.
- [4] Brian Hansen. "Combating Plagiarism: Is the Internet Causing More Students to Copy?" *The CQ Researcher*, 13(32), 2003.
- [5] Katie Hafner. "Lessons in Internet Plagiarism." *The New York Times*, June 28, 2001.
- [6] Jay Vegso. "Interest in CS as a Major Drops among Incoming Freshmen." *Computing Research News*, 17(3), May 2005.
- [7] Cass Sunstein. *Republic.com*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2001.