

Plagiarism

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Plagiarism is an illegitimate and unethical activity which qualifies as both *theft* and *fraud*. Simply stated, plagiarism consists of taking and presenting another person's work as your own. Taking someone else's work (intellectual property) constitutes *theft*; presenting it as your own (misrepresentation) is *fraudulent activity*. Further, in the context of this class, the General Education Literature Program, the English Department, and the University of Iowa, plagiarism is unethical because it violates University policy, and therefore the trust between students, their classmates, and their teachers. In order to maintain university standards, instructors are obligated to report any and all cases of plagiarism.

The following description of the consequences for plagiarism appears in the University of Iowa *Student Academic Handbook*:

An instructor who suspects a student of plagiarism or cheating must inform the student—in writing—as soon as possible after the incident has been observed or discovered. If the instructor comes to the conclusion that the student has plagiarized or cheated, he or she, in consultation with the departmental executive officer (DEO), may decide to reduce the student's grade in the course, even to assign an F. The DEO sends a written report of the case to the associate dean for academic programs; a copy is sent to the student.

The associate dean for academic programs may uphold, as the offense may warrant, the following or other penalties: disciplinary warning until graduation, suspension from the college for a calendar year or longer, or recommendation of expulsion from the University by the president. See the Student Academic Handbook, or go to: http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook

While the definition of plagiarism may seem crystal clear at first, actually, it can be quite complicated since it can range from incorrectly citing a source to the wholesale copying of information and ideas from someone else without citing that person at all. In order to ensure your understanding of plagiarism and to ensure your own academic integrity, please read through the following definitions of terms.

Intellectual Property

In order to understand the concept of intellectual property, consider it an abstract equivalent of concrete property. In other words, you own your ideas and thoughts just like you own a car. Consider the following example: When I purchase a book, the book itself becomes my property while the ideas and words contained in the book are the property of the author. However, my interpretation of the book's contents is my intellectual property.

Sources

We often refer to primary and secondary sources. A *primary source* is the text on which you are writing, e.g. *Hamlet* or *The Handmaid's Tale*. *Secondary sources* include published and unpublished texts (such as other people's papers, *Cliffs Notes*, information from internet sites, journals, magazines, newspapers, etc.), as well as conversations, lectures, notes, films, and radio and television programs. In short, secondary sources include anything and everything that is not a primary text. All of these things qualify as someone else's work and must be properly cited.

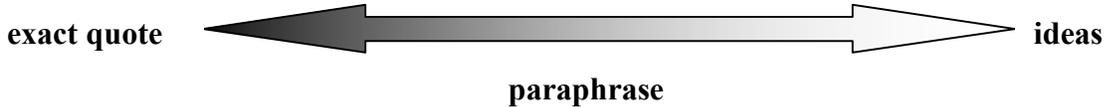
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Citation

A citation is a method of referring your reader to the source you have used for an exact quotation, a paraphrase, or an idea (see below for examples and further explanation). Citations usually appear at the end of a sentence and may follow a variety of formats, such as MLA, APA, and Chicago Style. The English Department usually recommends MLA Style (see the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*), but you should find out from your instructor which format you should use for the class.

Use of Sources

Scholars use primary and secondary sources to give weight to their arguments about a text. Use of primary and secondary sources can range from *exact quotation* to *paraphrasing* someone's work to using someone's *ideas* in a more general and abstract sense.



The easiest method to understand is *exact quotation* (or *direct quotation*). For example, Hamlet says “To be, or not to be” (3.1.58). In fact, he says it *exactly* like that. Quotation marks indicate the *precise* wording of the phrase in the source. If you change a word or some punctuation inside the quotation marks, you are misrepresenting your source.

Although *paraphrasing* can be defined as putting someone else's ideas into your own words, there are correct and incorrect ways to do this. Changing a word or two here and there is insufficient. Consider the following examples of proper and improper paraphrasing of the following passage from *Cliffs Notes*: “The overwhelming cause of Hamlet's grief is revealed in his soliloquy: the incestuous union of his mother and his uncle” (21).

- **improper:** The big reason that Hamlet is upset is demonstrated in his speech about the relationship between Gertrude and Claudius. *Note that even if the source were cited here, the language is too close to the original to be a proper paraphrase. In this case the author should just quote the source word for word and use quotation marks.*
- **proper:** According to *Cliffs Notes*, Hamlet's soliloquy focuses on his anger about his mother's marriage so soon after his father's death. He views the new relationship as incestuous. *Note that when you give credit to your sources, you also open up space for clearly establishing your own opinion.*

Finally, in both of these examples, both of the key ideas from the source have been used. However, you should keep in mind that even were you to use only one, you would still need to cite your source.

Using someone's *ideas* in a more general and abstract sense gets really hazy. The thing to remember here is that ideas—as well as words—are intellectual property and therefore need to be cited no matter how generally or specifically you use them. For example, according to *Cliffs Notes*, some people believe that the ghost in *Hamlet* is untrustworthy (12). If you came across this idea in *Cliffs Notes* and decided you wanted to use any part of it in your argument, you would need to cite *Cliffs Notes* as your source. Additionally, if you came across an argument about one character or text and applied that argument to another character or text, you would need to cite the source.

For more information on plagiarism, see the following:

- your instructor
- The U of I *Student Academic Handbook*, online at www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook
- Georgetown University's Honor Council webpage: www.georgetown.edu/honor/plagiarism.html