

Plagiarism: A Personal Perspective

Plagiarism is the act of taking another author's words, thoughts or conceptual analysis of a body of ideas, and presenting them as the originator without giving credit and appropriate reference to the true source. Whether deliberate or unintentional, plagiarism is considered stealing of intellectual property [1, 2]. Given the large number of resources available today, especially those found on the internet, inadvertent plagiarism is a problem [3]. An understanding of what constitutes plagiarism is important in the creation of truly authentic work. Plagiarism can be avoided by attentiveness in referencing all source materials utilized to build a body of work. This can be achieved through the implementation of proper citation practices, acceptable paraphrasing, and the utilization of quotations when text is extracted directly from the source [4, 5].

A "citation" is mandatory if you are using another author's work to express your ideas. Citations must include the following: "Information about the author, the title of the work, the name and location of the company that published your copy of the source, the date your copy was published, the page numbers of the material you are borrowing" [6]. It is important to recognize that multiple citations do not weaken a body of work or detract from its original quality. Citations, on the contrary, provide a backbone which helps to support the writer's presentation [6, 7]. The presence of citations can also serve to ultimately enhance or reject an idea that has been previously published.

In the process of researching a new subject, it is critical to have a clear understanding of the concept of paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is essentially "taking another person's ideas and putting those ideas in your own words." [7]. Paraphrasing is considered acceptable if the writer captures the concepts in the original source by creating a unique summary of the information and carefully referencing where the ideas came from [8]. It is very important to always give credit to the originator of the idea even if you are expanding or elaborating on the original concept [8]. A key distinction here is that the thoughts must be reconfigured into a unique presentation. Simply keeping the sentence structure of the source and changing or rearranging a few select words is not advisable [8, 9]. Reconfiguration can be achieved by reading the body of work that contains the ideas of interest and then removing the document from your presence to avoid the temptation of copying the style of the originator. The goal is to create a unique expression and summary [8, 9]. Upon completion, it is wise to check your paraphrase against the original document to ensure that you have effectively and accurately communicated the intent of what you are paraphrasing and that you did not mistakenly use the same words or phrases of the source reference. Likewise, if exact words are extracted from any given source, they must be put in quotations, whereby the source and page number are clearly indicated. As long as credit is given to the creator, there is nothing wrong with using exact words; sometimes the words of the originator are the best way to get the point across [10]. Finally, it is not necessary to document the source of information or data that are considered common knowledge; this would apply to information that is widely

accepted as fact. “Example: John F. Kennedy was elected President of the United States in 1960” [8].

One of the key practices to safeguard against plagiarism is good note-taking. If you are using someone else’s words, it is essential to immediately place these words in quotes with the appropriate references of credit. Furthermore, ideas or insights given by another author must be immediately referenced in your notes. This way, when you go back to construct a paper with your own unique ideas on the subject, it will be easy to differentiate your ideas from the author’s that have helped to support your unique body of work [11]. It is also highly advisable to proofread your work by cross-referencing and confirming the validity of your sources. When applicable, it is also important to ensure that all references in your work that require citation are accurately documented via footnotes, endnotes, and bibliography. If you are using another author’s idea to back up your work, you must reference the author’s name in the applicable sentence or throughout the body of the paragraph where the idea is captured. In addition, you must also protect your own work to ensure that others do not steal from you. Drafts should always be maintained, whereby each version is referenced in sequence as it evolves. If you are working on a network where multiple individuals have access to your drafts, password protection of your draft documents and files is recommended [11].

The impact of plagiarism on educational institutions is profound. Countless resources and authors with pre-existing works are easily available to students. As a result, there may be a temptation to take shortcuts because the subject matter is already at hand. Individually, students suffer because they deny themselves the opportunity to work with their own unique thoughts and interpretations [12]. Ultimately, however, it is the integrity of the institution that suffers the most, its foundation of learning “cracked” under the false pretenses of original work.

There will always be a pre-existing template of knowledge which a student must navigate through to build his/her own body of data. Today, there are many software packages available to aid accurately in the detection of plagiarism. These instruments are helpful tools in monitoring current writings and preventing future occurrences. Although it is often a challenge to use and correctly cite published works while developing an authentic train of thought and tying references together, this process is essential to the creation and validation of original thought.

References

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