



How to Avoid Plagiarism

Student Success Tool

*He liked those literary cooks
Who skim the cream of others' books;
And ruin half an author's graces
By plucking bon-mots from their places.*

—Hannah More

What is Plagiarism?

It is important to understand the exact definition of plagiarism, why it is so important to teachers, and how to avoid it. Plagiarism, broadly defined, encompasses presenting other people's ideas as your own without clearly giving them credit. You must give credit to your source in the following examples:

Any part of a text you directly quote in your paper. You need to put any and every word that belongs to someone else that you copied from their text in quotation marks (with the exception of words like 'and' or 'the').

Any part of a text you paraphrase.

Any part of a text you summarize.

Any person's original thoughts, opinions, or ideas.

Any facts, statistics, graphs or information that is not 'common knowledge.'

Note: Plagiarism has always been a problem, but recently it has become an epidemic. As such, many schools subscribe to 'plagiarism finders.' These pay-for-services allow a teacher to input a portion of your paper to be scanned against a wealth of information. This service will alert the teacher if your information was improperly cited.

Paraphrasing

One of the most often misused elements of writing a research paper is in the improper presentation of paraphrased material. To paraphrase is to completely recast the content of a source in your own words, keeping the same tone and general length of the original. Even when you paraphrase, you must include a citation.

Below is a piece of original text followed by examples of incorrect and correct methods of paraphrasing such material.

Original Author: Tracy Willard

Original Source: Electronic with no page numbers

Original Text:

The comparison of Connie's music to "a Church service" shows that music takes the place of religion that would normally be a more important source of moral behavior and rules. The fact that Connie's

interaction with Friend occurs on a Sunday could be meant to explore how a lack of religious practice affects the family: “none of them bothered with church.” Although all the other members of Connie’s family go to a picnic, an activity that could reasonably replace the communal and social aspects of a church attendance, Connie does not attend either Church or the family picnic. When Connie first sees Friend’s car and interprets him as a harmless suitor, her first response is to say “Christ, Christ” appealing (if obliquely) to religion to help her look better. One critic comments that the story itself is “about the spiritual condition of late twentieth century American Culture, which Oates believes has become a wasteland” (Slimp). Slimp argues that Connie experiences a “growth of her spiritual nature” during the course of the story.

Another critic, Marie Mitchell Olesen Urbanski, suggests that the story is in fact “the framework of a religious allegory—the seduction of Eve.” Many interpretations are possible.

Unacceptable Paraphrase Example:

The parallel of Connie’s music to what would happen in a church service shows that music takes the place of religion that would provide moral behavior and rules. The lack of religion in the family’s life, “none of them bothered with church,” may be one reason Connie is influenced by Friend. When Connie’s family goes to the picnic that may replace the social aspects of church and Connie does not attend, it shows her lack of spiritual and familial guidance. Even though Connie says “Christ, Christ” when she sees Friend, she is only using religion to help her look better. The story is about “the spiritual condition of late twentieth century American Culture” (Slimp). Marie Mitchell Olesen Urbanski says “the story is in fact the framework of a religious allegory—the seduction of Eve.” Many different and diverse interpretations are possible (Willard).

The paraphrase above is unacceptable for several reasons:

1. The underlined sections are phrases excerpted directly from the original and are presented without quotation marks. This is plagiarism.
2. The two quotes from secondary sources appear in the essay as though the student has researched and read them, not that they are quoted in the original source.
3. The student has made mistakes in what was included in the original text quotes.
4. Most importantly, even though the writer of the paraphrase has identified the original essay’s author [Willard] in the end citation, this does not change the fact that word-for-word sections are used without quotation marks, making the whole paragraph an example of plagiarism.

Acceptable Paraphrase Example:

The music that Connie listens to is substituted for what a church service would provide, including guidelines for “moral behavior and rules” (Willard). Because the family does not attend any church service, they may lack the spiritual foundation that would lead to Connie being vulnerable to Friend’s influence. The family’s choice to go a barbeque instead of church shows they are replacing church activities with family activities, but Connie chooses and is allowed to stay home. Ironically, Connie calls on Christ when the men arrive; she uses the term not to ask for spiritual guidance but

rather as almost a curse word in her frustration to ‘look better’ for them (Willard). One critical evaluation by Slimp is that the story is “the spiritual condition of late twentieth century American Culture” (qtd. in Willard). Marie Mitchell Olsen Urbanski says the story “is the framework of a religious allegory—the seduction of Eve” (qtd. in Willard). There are several ways to understand the absence of religion in this story (Willard).

The paraphrase above is acceptable for several reasons:

1. It successfully rephrases the original content without reproducing any of the same phrases.
2. When it does use the same words as the original, they appear in quotation marks and the author is cited (Willard).
3. The writer has clarified the sources mentioned in the original source by name in the sentence (Slimp and Urbanski), and identified in the citation as opinions researched by Willard and not you. This is important because anything cited in parentheses should be included on the Works Cited page of your paper. You should not list “Slimp and Urbanski” on this page because you did not read their source, you read Willard [who will be included on your Works Cited page] who quoted them.
4. The entire paraphrase is cited at the end (Willard).

Note: When you paraphrase, even if you give credit at the end of the paraphrase but fail to put in quotations any phrases or sentences that need quotation marks, *you will be plagiarizing*.

Additional Resources

Read the following articles to learn more about plagiarism and how to avoid it.

Plagiarism.org

<http://www.plagiarism.org/>

Online Writing Lab (OWL): Avoiding Plagiarism

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/1/>

Note: If your institution subscribes to EBSCO’s *Literary Reference Center* database, you can access EBSCO’s Guide to Literary Research, Writing, and Critical Reading from the database home page. Under Reference Shelf, click on the “Research Guide” link, and the guide will launch in a new browser window.