

How Not to Plagiarize

Here is the ISU official policy about plagiarism, taken from the Student Handbook: "Unacknowledged use of the information, ideas, or phrasing of other writers is an offense comparable with theft and fraud, and it is so recognized by the copyright and patent laws. Literary offenses of this kind are known as plagiarism.' One is responsible for plagiarism when: the exact words of another writer are used without using quotation marks and indicating the source of the words; the words of another are summarized or paraphrased without giving the credit that is due; the ideas from another writer are borrowed without properly documenting their source."

I understand the temptation to plagiarize in some classes. The teacher may give a "fake," meaningless assignment; a student may feel justified in responding with a "fake," plagiarized answer. Personally, I think that honesty with myself and with others is so important that plagiarism is never justified. But in any case: in this course, if you think an assignment is "fake," come and argue your view to me, and if I agree, we'll arrange a non-fake assignment for you and possibly everyone else as well. Therefore, there is never an excuse for plagiarism in this course.

As you construct your arguments in this course, you will be drawing from the arguments and judgments of others. Therefore you'll have to take special care to *use* sources without *plagiarizing* from them. Here are some simple suggestions about how to do this.

In a written argument, the solution is obvious: make sure you use quotation marks, and identify the source of the quotation. You can do the identification whatever way you find easiest; either with a footnote, or with a textual reference to an attached bibliography. Either something like "this"¹ or like "this" (Smith, 1999, p. 3).

Bibliography

Smith, J. (1999). Title. <URL>.

Whichever you do, it will look much more professional if you use some recognized bibliographic form, like APA, MLA or Chicago Manual of Style.

In an oral argument there are no quotation marks, so the matter is trickier. Make sure you lead in to every quote by identifying *at least* the author. There are a lot of ways of doing this; for example:

According to Smith....
As Smith said.....
Smith has stated.....
Smith remarks....

¹ J. Smith. (1999). Title. <URL>.

Whatever—make it clear before you even start to quote that what comes next is a quotation.

If the quotation is short (one sentence), it will probably be clear to your audience when you're no longer quoting. If necessary, you can emphasize the end of a quote with a pause, looking up from the card from which you were reading. To mark the end of a longer quote, you may need to explicitly tell your audience that the quote is over. For example:

That's what Smith said. This means...
As you can see, Smith supports our idea....

Or simply say, "end quote"—clumsy, but very clear.

These are the *minimum* things you must do to avoid plagiarism. But I suggest you may want to do *more*, in order to make your argument stronger. If you are relying on a trustworthy source, why not flag that information for your audience? Why not explicitly state (or write):

Doctor Smith, world renowned expert in jellyfish, stated in his 1999 publication...

Notice that you're not just identifying a quotation, you're also giving your audience information about the *knowledge* and *recency* of the source. Indeed, if you can't share this information with your audience, then probably you shouldn't be relying on that source!

One final note. It is possible to avoid plagiarism by making clear that you are quoting large chunks from other materials. This means that I won't be reporting you to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action—good! But if large chunks of your work are borrowed from others, it will of course affect your grade. *Your* arguments should be a result of *your* thought processes. Although it is difficult to find a really new argument in any major public debate, there is a big difference between just borrowing someone else's and thinking through things on your own. Come and talk to me if you start getting worried about this.