

Guidelines for the Documentation of Academic Work

(Adapted from UMass Boston Department of Political Science)

To represent someone else's work as your own is intellectual fraud. And failure to provide full and clear indication of the sources from which your work derives is, at minimum, intellectual sloppiness. The first of these, plagiarism, is viewed by the College and by the University as a matter of utmost seriousness that can lead to sanctions as severe as suspension or dismissal. Every student is expected to read and respect the sections of the University Bulletin on "Academic Standards, Cheating, and Plagiarism" and "Student Rights and Responsibilities." The following guidelines will protect you from unintentional academic dishonesty and assist you in mastering the procedures and conventions governing academic documentation. Do not hesitate to speak with your instructor or your advisor about any point that remains unclear.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the practice of taking the writings and ideas of another and presenting them as your own. There are any number of reasons why you should never consider doing it: it wastes your and your instructor's time, it may constitute a violation of copyright law, it puts you at risk of severe penalties (including suspension or dismissal) and, most important, it undermines the foundations of intellectual honesty and academic integrity, without which our joint enterprise here at the university cannot possibly succeed.

Steps you can take to avoid plagiarism

While it may sometimes seem difficult to specify exactly where the ideas of others end and your own begin, you can always protect yourself from any suspicion of plagiarism by the simple expedient of documenting your work. Follow these guidelines:

Whenever you copy something from another text, place all copied words within quotation marks (or, in the case of longer passages, in a separate indented paragraph) and identify precisely the source from which they come. As a rule of thumb, if you take 3 or more words in a row from a single source, they should be in quotes.

Whenever you paraphrase from another text, provide the same sort of reference; in these cases however, you should not use quotation marks (or indent).

If your paper includes significant factual claims (especially ones that are important to your argument or which a reader might question), provide a reference to the source from which you derived the information or data. Failure to do this need not (unlike 1 and 2) imply plagiarism, but it can significantly weaken your case.

References used for any of the above-listed purposes should be both complete and precise so that your reader can easily consult the specific page(s) of the specific text that you used. A list of all the sources you consulted should be included at the end of a paper. (See the accompanying

department style sheet for instructions about the form and essential elements of a reference or bibliography.)

Some "sources" are inappropriate even if they are properly documented. A paper written for a similar course at another institution and posted by the student on his dorm-room web site is not an appropriate basis for your own paper. An article published in the National Enquirer will generally not provide the sort of documentary support that an academic paper requires. In such cases, full and explicit documentation will at least protect you from the charge of plagiarism; it may not protect you from the charge of using poor intellectual judgment!

When an instructor asks you to submit a piece of written work it is assumed, unless other instructions are explicitly given, that you (not you and your friend) are the author. If "working together" means reading and discussing one another's papers, great. It should never, however, mean that you both hand in the same, or substantially the same, piece of work. (If your instructor were to assign a joint project you would, of course, be expected to clearly identify its co-authors.)

Work that you submit in a course for credit should not be something that you have already submitted (and received credit for) in another course. There are exceptions to this rule; however, double submissions are never acceptable unless the instructors of both courses are clearly informed of the overlap.

Still have questions? Talk with your instructor! The time to clarify doubts about documentation is before you submit a written assignment, not after it has been found problematic.

Possible Consequences of Plagiarism

If you are caught plagiarizing on an assignment or a test your instructor has the right to give you a grade of a zero for that test or assignment.

Your instructor also has the right to record the act of plagiarizing on your academic record. (See the student's Code of Conduct for more detailed information of the actions that will occur if you are culpable of plagiarizing.)

We remind you that term paper corporations are illegal enterprises in the Commonwealth; a person convicted of selling term papers, theses, or research papers intended to be used for academic credit may be subject to a fine and/or imprisonment. The legal status of web-based term paper sites is somewhat less clear at this time; we do, however, endeavor to monitor such sites and caution you against playing with the fire that they represent!

Respecting the submission of written work

We know that you, our students, are capable of the highest levels of intellectual achievement and our concerns over plagiarism are directly proportional to our respect for your ability and your hard work. You should not be put in a position of having to compete with individuals who purchase or steal their work from others. We hope that you support us in this effort. If you have questions or concerns about any aspect of these policies, please talk with us about them.

Right ways and wrong ways: Some Examples

What does all this mean in practice?

Suppose you read the following passage in Manuel Castells' *End of Millennium* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 190:

The extraordinary growth of the drug traffic industry since the 1970s has transformed the economics and politics of Latin America. Classic paradigms of dependency and development have to be rethought to include, as a fundamental feature, the characteristics of the drugs industry, and its deep penetration of state institutions and social organization. The industry is mainly centered around the production, processing and export of coca and cocaine. However, in the 1990s heroin is becoming an increasingly important component. . . .

How might you use this source in a paper?

Global criminal networks have had a significant impact on legitimate institutions in many parts of the world. Thus, for example, "growth of the drug traffic industry since the 1970s has transformed the economics and politics of Latin America" (Castells, 1998, p. 190).

The most straightforward case: you have copied Castells' words, and so you must enclose them in quotation marks and provide a reference.

Global crime has serious political effects. For instance, the sharp rise in the narcotics trade during the last three decades has fundamentally changed the nature of markets and states in Latin America (Castells, 1998, p. 190).

The words may be your own, but the second sentence is a simple paraphrase of Castells. Hence, you must provide a reference but do not use quotation marks.

The impact of crime is seen in the "growth of the drug traffic industry since the 1970s which has transformed the politics of Latin America" (Castells, 1998, p. 190).

No problem of plagiarism here, but you have taken liberties with Castells' wording. The words enclosed in quotation marks must be exactly what the author wrote; you are not permitted to "improve" them! If the grammatical requirements of your sentence mandate a change, either switch to paraphrase (and remove the quotation marks) or clearly indicate your changes with square brackets (for additions) and/or ellipses (for subtractions).

The impact of crime is seen in the "growth of the drug traffic industry since the 1970s [which] has transformed the . . . politics of Latin America" (Castells, 1998, p. 190).

Here is a way to correct the problem in the preceding example.

Heroin became increasingly important in the Latin American drug trade after 1990 (Castells, 1998, p. 190).

The issue here is not plagiarism, but empirical grounding. If the claim about heroin is important to your argument, you should indicate the source on which it is based. (If this is a significant research project or if this claim is particularly crucial to your argument, you might even want to go back and validate Castells' own sources.) If the truth of the claim is not important to your argument, you might as well omit the sentence altogether!

Heroin became increasingly important in the Latin American drug trade during the 1990s (People Magazine).

Even if this were a good academic source (which it is not!) the reference would be close to useless because you don't specify a specific date and page number. Remember: the whole point of a reference is to make it easy for your reader to follow the evidence trail.

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