

Everything You Need to Know About Plagiarism

What is plagiarism and why you need to take it seriously

Plagiarism is taking credit for someone else's words or thoughts as your own. It is essentially intellectual theft. Plagiarism is a violation academic integrity. UCA is dedicated to academic integrity as indicated by Board Policy 709 which reads:

The mission of the University of Central Arkansas commits all members of the university community to acquiring, sharing, evaluating, and communicating knowledge. Such a commitment includes an expectation of academic integrity, an organizational and individual commitment to honesty and responsibility in teaching and learning. By their affiliation with the University of Central Arkansas, all members of the university community are committed to shared responsibility for maintaining the highest standards of academic integrity. Although this policy focuses on the academic integrity in course-related work, its basis and context is the commitment made by the entire university community.

The university's academic integrity policy applies to all students enrolled in courses at the University of Central Arkansas. All forms of academic misconduct at the University of Central Arkansas will be regarded as serious. Just as there are consequences to stealing a television, on a campus there are consequences for any form of academic misconduct. Consequences might include a failing grade for the course, suspension from the university for a semester or expulsion. You can find more about the different forms of academic misconduct, their consequences, and the disciplinary process on pages 39-43 in your Student Handbook at http://uca.edu/student/files/2011/06/student_handbook.pdf.

Why do instructors care about plagiarism?

When instructors give you an assignment they typically want you to show that you have:

- an understanding of material you have been asked to read
- that you can refer to your sources to support your ideas
- that you can distinguish *your* analysis and ideas of the reading from what the *author* actually said

When you cite your sources you are using an expert's ideas as evidence to support your conclusions. Failing to cite means you are saying you came up with those ideas on your own; that the ideas are your work. If you do not cite your source, you have committed plagiarism.

How to avoid plagiarism

1. Keep good notes that start with bibliographic information. Be sure to use quotation marks when you transfer information onto a note card so you'll know what the original language said.
2. Whenever you *use three or more words in a row* verbatim from the source material, you must put the words in quotation marks and cite them. Doing one but not both of these is still plagiarism.
3. If the words are yours, but the ideas belong to your source you do not need quotation marks. However, you **MUST** give credit to your source as a citation and as a lead-in to tell the reader whose idea it is.

4. Do not give one citation at the end of a long paragraph. The reader has no way of knowing if the whole paragraph or the last sentence is the source's idea.
5. When in doubt, CITE YOUR SOURCE!

Beware of unacceptable paraphrasing!

Many students think that if they rearrange the words or replace them with synonyms that they have not committed plagiarism. This is NOT TRUE! Below are examples of unacceptable and acceptable paraphrasing:

Here is the ORIGINAL text from Richard Godbeer's *Escaping Salem: The Other Witch Hunt of 1692* pages 129-130:

Most accused witches made a brief and dramatic appearance in the records at the time of their trial and then returned to obscurity once the ordeal was over. The transcripts from witch trials often seem like narrow-beamed spot-lights that play upon an otherwise darkened landscape. What happened after the trial ended is in most cases a mystery, unless the defendant was condemned to death (and even then we do not always know for certain that the sentence was carried out) or unless the accused was acquitted and then put on trial again at some later date.

Here is an UNACCEPTABLE paraphrase that is plagiarism:

Lots of accused witches made a short appearance in trial records and then disappeared into obscurity when the trial was over. Transcripts from witch trials often are like flash light beams in a dark room, we only see what happens when the trial is happening. What happens after the trial is often unknown unless the accused was actually killed or unless they were acquitted and re-tried later.

This is plagiarism because the writer only changed words and phrases or the order of a sentence **and** there is no citation for where the ideas came from. Notice also that in changing some of the sentences the original nuances are lost which can either make a sentence grammatically incorrect, or factually wrong.

Here is an ACCEPTABLE paraphrase:

Although modern readers would like to know more about the people accused of witchcraft, unfortunately often all that survives is their appearance in the trial transcripts. Their life before and after is lost to us. This might even include whether the condemned was actually killed unless she was later accused again and retried. (Godbeer, 129-130)

This is acceptable because the writer accurately remade the information into her own words and lets the reader know the source of her information.

Here is an example of quotation and paraphrase together:

Although modern readers would like to know more about the people accused of witchcraft, unfortunately often all that survives is their appearance in the trial transcripts. (Godbeer, 129) Historian Richard Godbeer describes it as a “brief and dramatic appearance in the records” before they are “returned to obscurity.” Their life before and after is lost to us. This might even include whether the condemned was actually killed unless they were “acquitted and then put on trial again at some later date.” (Godbeer, 129-130)

Note that this is acceptable because it uses the writer's own words, gives credit to the source, and indicates what part of the material was taken directly from the source with quotation marks and citation.

Common knowledge

Common knowledge is information that is generally known by most people. For example, it is common knowledge that George Washington was the first president of the United States. This does not need a citation. That George Washington was the only president to be unanimously elected by the Electoral College is not common knowledge and needs a citation.

If you are in doubt if something is common knowledge try asking yourself: Did I know this information before I took this class? Would my neighbor know this information? If the answer is no, then the information is not common knowledge and needs a citation. Did this information come from something I read or heard in lecture? If the answer is yes, then the information needs a citation.

Several online tutorials exist to test your new knowledge about plagiarism:

www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/plagiarismtutorial.php;
<http://panther.indstate.edu/tutorials/plagiarism/index.html>;
<https://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/>

The materials here were adapted from <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/plagiarism>; www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml;
http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/Acknowledging_Sources.pdf; www.wpacouncil.org; www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_printable_handouts.html;
<http://appserv.mnstate.edu/Instrtech/its/main.php>