

# Plagiarism: Recognize and Avoid It

## What is plagiarism?

**Plagiarism is the use of someone else's ideas, processes, results, equipment design, visuals, wording, or even sentence structure as if they were your own, whether the source is printed or electronic.**

Every incoming student receives information about plagiarism from the Rice University Honor Council, which judges cases of alleged **Academic Fraud**: “Violating the **Honor Code** requirements of an assignment or failing to credit one's sources constitutes academic fraud and would, therefore, violate the Honor Code.” The Council defines plagiarism as “quoting, paraphrasing, or otherwise using another's words or ideas as one's own without properly crediting the source.” A “false citation” or “false data” are also violations. Current penalties range from a three-semester suspension and a failing course grade to a warning, depending on circumstances. Check the Honor Council website for further details.

**Rice University Policy No. 324, Research Misconduct**, states “Research misconduct means fabrication, falsification or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. . . . Research misconduct, however, does not include honest error or differences of opinion” (2011).

**Professional journals**, too, are checking more closely for plagiarism, including self-plagiarism (using your own previously published work with or without citation).

Therefore, **you plagiarize if you**

- Use someone else's ideas, processes, results, equipment design, visuals, or wording without citing the source;
- Copy something word for word without using quotation marks, even if you cite the source;
- Write an unacceptable paraphrase, changing the source wording only minimally, even though you cite the source;
- Use all or part of a visual without crediting the source.

## Why is it important to avoid plagiarism?

In the United States, plagiarism is considered **academic misconduct**, and you are expected to recognize and avoid plagiarism. It is YOUR responsibility to use quotation marks when using exact source words, to paraphrase correctly, and to cite all sources whether on slides or in written text. You must cite the source even if no author is identified, as on Wikipedia.

Plagiarized work can result in a failing course grade, expulsion from graduate school, rejection of a paper submitted for publication, denial of an advanced degree, loss of your scholarly reputation, or loss of job.

Most journals run every submitted paper through software that checks for plagiarism. Some journals say explicitly that a paper containing any plagiarism will be rejected; in some cases no paper by that author will be accepted for 3-5 years or longer. Unfortunately, the Internet has made plagiarism easier than ever before, much research is done online, and it is easy to import blocks of text without noting the source. You might also infringe on someone's patent, thereby leaving yourself open for a lawsuit.

## How can you avoid plagiarizing?

1. For each source you read, **keep electronic notes**. You might want to use the **Template for Taking Notes**, which can be downloaded from the Rice Center for Engineering Leadership (RCEL): [www.rcel.rice.edu](http://www.rcel.rice.edu). As you enter the information, proofread for

completeness and accuracy. Be careful to put quotation marks around any blocks of text or wording that you import so that later you can put it into your own words and won't accidentally plagiarize.

2. If in your writing you copy something **word for word**, put **quotation marks** around it and cite it: (Jones 2010). **Paraphrase by putting ideas into your own words**; cite the source of the ideas: (Adams et al. 2009). Because you cannot paraphrase a visual, **if you copy a figure or table, cite it** at the end of the caption and inside the period: (Alvarez 2010). **If you change a figure or table or use only part of it, cite it** at the end of the caption: (Adapted from Alvarez 2010). Put the **complete bibliographic reference for all citations** in the Bibliography (or Works Cited).
3. **Practice paraphrasing (putting someone else's ideas into your own words)** because it's often difficult to do. Avoid the temptation of paraphrasing too many details. Focus on the main idea or evidence that you need to cite. (Read carefully—don't change the meaning!) Once you have determined what you need to paraphrase, reread the source and then cover it up. Write the main idea from memory and then check to verify that you haven't used exact wording or sentence structure. Simply changing the verb tense or substituting one adverb for another, but leaving the sentence structure essentially the same, is still considered to be plagiarism. Remember, too, that a paraphrase is always considerably shorter than the original text.
4. **Always cite your source, whether for text, visuals, or ideas**, including those from papers or posters at conferences. If you cannot remember the source, you cannot use the information. Put citations in as you write your first draft so that you don't have to go back later when identifying the source may be difficult. If you use any material from one of your own previously published sources, cite it.

If you are using parts or all of one or more of your published papers in a Master's thesis or PhD dissertation, check the journal contract to see if you already have permission to do so. Otherwise, contact the journal for permission. Keep a paper copy of your request and of their answer. If you are using an entire paper as a chapter, identify it at the beginning of the chapter and then cite it often during the course of the chapter.

Rice now publishes all theses and dissertations as open access works. Since journals want to publish only new material, they probably won't accept work from your Rice-published thesis as a paper. Therefore, if you plan to write a paper based on previously unpublished research reported in your thesis, your advisor can request that your thesis be "embargoed" for 6 – 12 months to give you time to submit a paper. Only then will the university put your thesis into open source electronic access. But your advisor must request that embargo from the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies!
5. In your text, **make clear whose work you are referencing**. It often works well to name the author at the beginning of a short paragraph and then give the citation reference at the close of the paragraph. For example: Alvarez disagrees, however, stating that the polymer is not strengthened significantly by ..... Indeed, the evidence given in the paper indicates increased strength of only .005 percent (2010). If the paragraph is long or includes more than one reference, you need to give the reference more than once.
6. Generally, it is a good idea to **identify an author by name rather than by referring to a number in your bibliography**, though this practice varies somewhat by field or by journal. In any case, **try not use a reference number as a part of speech**. Do not, for example, write that "[10] gives more compelling evidence than [98] provides." Think of how time consuming it is for a reader to have to keep flipping to the bibliography to see who has said what. It would be preferable to write "Johnson et al. (10) give more compelling evidence than Dickerson et al. (98) provide." And then move to the evidence, clearly identifying the references as you discuss the evidence each author gives. [Whether you use square brackets or parentheses depends on the field or journal.]

## Examples of Citation within the Text

**CONFUSING:** [10] and [15] were the next to apply this algorithm to new nanoshell applications.

**CONFUSING:** The first big improvement came in the work of [10].

**CLEAR:** Koninsky et al. (10) and Rebert et al. (15) were the next to apply this algorithm to new nanoparticle applications.

**CLEAR:** The first application of this algorithm to gold-coated silica nanoparticles came in 2007 (Smith and Wesson 2008).

**LESS CLEAR:** Research teams then began to apply this algorithm to gold-coated silica nanoparticles [10, 15]. (But at least the reference is not used as a part of speech.)

**CLEAR:** Research teams then began to apply this algorithm to new nanoparticle applications. (See, for example, Smith and Wesson 2008 and Rebert et al. 2009.)

**CORRECT, but LESS CLEAR:** Research teams then began to apply this algorithm to new genetic sequences. (See, e.g., 10, 15, and 22.) [Too many commas—not clear]

**CLEAR:** (See, e.g., Smith and Wesson 2008 and Rebert et al. 2009.)

For suggestions on how to avoid plagiarism and cite information, see Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers's *The Bedford Handbook*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., 2010 or 9<sup>th</sup> ed., 2014. The book, available either as a print or an electronic copy, includes extensive examples of APA and Chicago style guides or go to other web sources. Always check a journal's Style Guide for citation specifics for a paper you are submitting. If you are submitting for publication outside the U.S., style expectations will differ. The preferred style may differ from field to field, as well. Ask fellow graduate students if they can recommend software that can automatically reformat to differing styles. If you have kept an accurate and complete electronic file of notes on what you read, you'll be able to meet any requirements.

For basic plagiarism information and IEEE citation style, see David F. Beer and David A. McMurrey's *A Guide to Writing as an Engineer*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 2005, pp. 235-243. Available as print text or E-Text.

## Using Internet Resources

- Everything on the Internet is copyrighted and requires permission to use in a journal article unless the site specifies free use. Check to see if the author provides information on how his/her work (e.g., video, audio, graphic, icon, web page) may be used. Follow the guidelines, if they exist. Free use simply means that you do not need permission to use the material; you still need to cite the source. You do not need permission for use in a class paper or a thesis, though you must cite the source, even for a source in which the author is not identified, as on Wikipedia.
- For anything you plan **to publish**, ask the owner of the copyright of the electronic source for permission to use the work. Because a journal usually owns the copyright of a published article, contact the journal for permission to cite. You need to specify what you would like to use. Keep a paper copy of your request for permission and of the permission received.
- If you use one of your own (first author) published papers in your thesis, you don't legally need permission from the other authors because all the authors have equal copyright rights, but you should notify them about your plans. (Some departments and faculty require you to get written permission from the other authors.) In your thesis clearly state the source and identify the contributions of the other authors. Most journals will give you permission to use your published paper, but check the contract!
- If you post on your personal web site a chapter from your unfinished thesis or a paper you plan to submit for publication, it is considered published and copyrighted by the act

of placing it on the Internet. Some journals will allow a previous posting on a personal web site; others will not: journals are becoming increasingly careful about self-plagiarism—if the material has been on the web, it has been published and a journal wishes to publish only information that is NEW. Some journals will let you reference your published paper on your personal website with a [link](#) to the journal after the paper has been published. Check the Style Guide and publishing requirements in the journal you wish to submit to *before* you post your work! Become familiar with the requirements of the major journals in your field.

- If you download from the Internet and then print a copy of an article published as print, you may cite it as a printed source. If you cite an article in an electronic journal, you must cite it as a Web source. If you read it on a Kindle or similar source, be aware that graphics are often omitted or distorted, though those sources are rapidly improving.

### **Examples of Citation in a Bibliography or Works Cited**

Notice that the same basic information is included in the three entries for journal articles, although the styles differ. Choose the style appropriate for what you are writing, and then be consistent within the document. You must follow a style guide.

If the Bibliography is set up numerically rather than alphabetically as in IEEE style, references are numbered consecutively within a text, and the bibliography entries would be numbered with the authors' names listed with first name (or initial) first as in [24] J. Conant.

#### **Print sources**

Beattie, Christopher, Mark Embree, and D. C. Sorensen. *Convergence of Polynomial Restart Krylov Methods for Eigenvalue Computation*. *SIAM Rev.*, 47 (2005), pp. 492-515. [Journal style]

Chen, J. Y., A. Kutana, C. P. Collier, and K.P. Giapis. Electrowetting in Carbon Nanotubes. *Science* **310**, 1480-1483 (2005). [Journal style]

Hacker, Diana & Sommers, Nancy (2010). *The Bedford Handbook*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. [APA style]

Nicolo, Micah J., Gerald R. Dickens, Christopher J. Hollis, and James C. Zachos. "Multiple early Eocene hyperthermals: Their sedimentary expression on the New Zealand continental margin and in the deep sea," *Geology* 35, no. 8 (2007): 699-702. [Chicago style]

[24] J. Conant. *109 East Palace: Robert Oppenheimer and the Secret City of Los Alamos*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005. [IEEE style]

#### **Electronic sources**

Travis, E. R.; Hannink, N. K.; van der Gast, C. J.; Thompson, I. P. ; Rosser, S. J.; Bruce, N. C. Impact of transgenic tobacco on trinitrotoluene (TNT) contaminated soil community. *Environ. Sci. Technol.* **2007**, 41 (16), 5854-5861; DOI 10.1021/es070507a. (As illustrated in the Style Guide for *Environmental Science & Technology*; note the substitution of the DOI for the URL and date retrieved when the DOI is available.)

Herbst, Roy S., M.D., PhD., and Scott M. Lippman, M.D. Molecular Signatures of Lung Cancer—Toward Personalized Therapy. *New England Journal of Medicine* 356, no. 1 (January 4, 2007): 76-78. Retrieved April 18, 2007 from <http://www.nejm.org>

## Examples of Plagiarizing and Paraphrasing

### The original text

“The times people choose for writing are often vestiges of old habits and time constraints. Undergraduates tend to write in the evening or late at night because they have classes and other responsibilities during the day. But habits of nocturnal writing often persist, unexamined, long after the writer’s circumstances have changed, among people who really function best in the morning. The majority of professional writers prefer to work during the day.

Regardless of your preferences, this needs to be a matter of choice, to the extent that you can choose times for writing. After all, you probably schedule other activities at appropriate times, according to your needs. I imagine that you cook or buy meals when you are likely to be hungry, that you sleep when you are tired, and that you run or play tennis when you have some energy, not when you are completely exhausted. Yet a surprising number of people try to write when they are least rested and alert, or most likely to be distracted.”

Hjortshoj, Keith (2001). *Understanding Writing Blocks*. New York: Oxford University Press, 108-9.

(The term “writing blocks” refers to those situations in which a writer is unable to make writing progress; in other words, a graduate student, for various possible reasons, is unable to write and may instead focus time and energy on other tasks, such as reading an almost endless list of background papers or running another iteration.)

Read the following examples and decide if each is paraphrasing or plagiarism. Underline any plagiarism.

1. The times graduate students choose for writing are often based on old habits and time limitations. If as an undergraduate you wrote at night, you need to look at how your circumstances have changed to see if you are one of those people who really function best in the morning. Most professional writers work during the day. But your decision needs to be a matter of choice, to the extent that you are able to choose times for writing. After all, you choose when to eat and when to sleep. Don’t try to write when you are least rested and alert, or likely to be distracted (Hjortshoj 2001).
2. If you are in the habit of doing your dissertation writing late at night, examine your motivation for writing then. You might simply be continuing old undergraduate habits instead of choosing to do your writing during the day when you are not too tired to think clearly.
3. Hjortshoj suggests that students should decide when to schedule their time for writing based on actual conditions rather than on habit. Whereas an undergraduate may need to write at night, a graduate student might be more alert and productive during the day (2001).
4. Keith Hjortshoi (2001) points out that students often choose times to write based on old habits and time constraints of undergraduate days when students tended to write in the evening or late at night. He recommends writing during the day rather than when you are least rested and alert, or more likely to be distracted.

## Analysis of the four responses

1. The times graduate students choose for writing are often based on old habits and time limitations. If as an undergraduate you wrote at night, you need to look at how your circumstances have changed to see if you are one of those people who really function best in the morning. Most professional writers work during the day. But your decision needs to be a matter of choice, to the extent that you are able to choose times for writing. After all, you choose when to eat and when to sleep. Don't try to write when you are least rested and alert, or likely to be distracted (Hjortshoj 2001).

The underlined portions are not sufficiently changed. Although some words are changed, “people” to “graduate students” in the first sentence and “majority of professional writers” to “most professional writers,” much of the paraphrase is taken word for word from the source. Even though the source is cited, this is clearly **PLAGIARISM**. Another problem: the attempted paraphrase is too long and summarizes unimportant points such as choosing when you eat or sleep.

2. This may look like a good paraphrase, but because the source is not cited, it is **PLAGIARISM**.
3. This is an acceptable **PARAPHRASE**. It summarizes the major points about choosing writing times based on current circumstances rather than on undergraduate habits. It suggests choosing to write during the day, but with the use of “may” and “might,” it also recognizes that a single approach won't work for all.
4. Keith Hjortshoi (2001) points out that students often choose times to write based on old habits and time constraints of undergraduate days when students tended to write in the evening or late at night. He recommends writing during the day rather than when you are least rested and alert, or more likely to be distracted. **PLAGIARISM**. Even though the source is cited, the underlined portions are all taken word for word. Changing the verb tense of “tend” to the past tense of “tended” is not sufficient change. And notice that the author's name is not spelled correctly.

## Frequently asked questions

### 1. When don't I have to cite the source for information?

You don't have to cite basic knowledge that is found in two or more textbooks. But neither can you use it word for word—you must paraphrase. The exception would be something like a common formula or algorithm; those you would have to use as they appear in the source. Just because 2000 people have read it on Wikipedia, that doesn't make it “basic knowledge.” It's basic if it is found in a number of reputable sources.

### 2. What if I'm using a common method that's difficult to reword? Do I have to cite the source?

If you use it word for word rather than paraphrasing it, you must cite the source. Many authors simply refer the reader to a paper that contains a clear explanation of the method instead of copying the method. I know of an Assistant Professor who was denied tenure for taking a commonly used method word for word from a published paper.

### 3. How do I cite a source that I read about in a different article, a review article, for example?

You will have to cite the source as well as the review article. However, as a scholar, you should read the original article instead of relying on what someone else says about it. Reviewers are not equally good, and even a good reviewer may be focusing on different

aspects of the article than you need. The exception would be an article originally published in a language you can't read or an article that is no longer available. In such cases you must make clear that it is the reviewer's interpretation that you are citing.

**4. What do I put in the Bibliography or Works Cited?**

Everything you cited and nothing that you did not cite.

**5. What should I do if I have an important quotation or a really relevant figure, but I can't remember where I found it?**

See if you can track it down via the Internet. If you can't find it, you can't use it.

**6. Can I cite my own previously published paper in my thesis or cite my thesis in a paper I'm submitting for publication?**

Of course, but ask the journal for permission, unless your contract with the journal already gives you permission to use the article in your thesis. You don't need to ask the other authors for permission because every author listed on a published paper has equal copyright ownership, but you should acknowledge their contributions. (Some departments require you to ask permission—be sure to check.) If you were first author and are now using essentially the entire paper as a chapter in your Master's or PhD thesis, make clear at the outset of the chapter that it comes from your paper (cite it clearly!). Then several times in the chapter, cite it again. If you use any figures or tables from the published paper, cite those as well at the end of the caption.

See #4 on page 2 for how to write and publish a paper based on previously unpublished research in your thesis or dissertation. Your advisor can request that your thesis be "embargoed" (meaning that Rice will not put it in open electronic source form for 6 – 12 months) so that you can write and submit a journal paper.

**7. Can I cite or publish something of mine that I have already posted on the Internet?**

Anything you have posted on any portion of the Internet is already copyrighted and therefore published. You can use that material in your thesis, but most journals will not accept anything that has already been "published" on the Internet. Once your paper has been published, though, you can put a link to it on your personal website.

**8. When do I have to get permission to quote or paraphrase someone else's work?**

In the academic world, this is sometimes a gray area. You usually don't have to get permission for use if you are writing a paper for a class, a Master's thesis, or a PhD dissertation, though you must cite the source. And because being cited helps faculty receive tenure or academic awards, most researchers are delighted to be cited. Because a journal usually owns the copyright of a published paper; you must ask the journal for permission to cite a written portion or a visual for anything you are submitting for publication (including your thesis or dissertation), including a paper in a *Proceedings*. If your paper comes out of funded research, you may need permission to publish what might be considered the intellectual property of the funding agency.