What is plagiarism?

According to the TCCD Student Handbook, plagiarism is “presenting as one’s own the ideas or writings of another without acknowledging or documenting the source(s) including:

- a. Copying directly from a book, periodical or electronic source without using quotation marks and references to sources;
- b. Summarizing or paraphrasing the ideas or opinions of an author or use the data collected by an author without citing the author as the source;
- c. Submitting papers or projects which do not reflect personal knowledge, voice and style” (41).

What is the difference between intentional versus unintentional plagiarism?

Intentional plagiarism is knowingly and willingly copying someone else’s ideas or words without giving them credit.

Some students commit plagiarism unintentionally, which occurs because students are new to doing research, unfamiliar with citing sources, or do not understand what constitutes plagiarism.

It is important to note that both intentional and unintentional plagiarism have serious consequences!
According to the TCCD Student Handbook, plagiarism is thus a violation of the student code of conduct for the school, and thus sanctions are imposed upon the student which include: reprimand, probation, disciplinary suspension, and even disciplinary expulsion.

Yes, if you plagiarize, you can be expelled from TCC.

Each part of the writing process is essential to avoid plagiarism, especially if you using sources. The writing process includes:
  - The research phase
  - The reading phase
  - The writing phase
  - The proofreading and editing phase

Given that many students plagiarize due to procrastination and unfamiliarity with the process, we have identified 5 steps you can take to avoid the dreaded “P” word.

**What are the 5 steps to avoid plagiarism?**

Here are the 5 steps.

**Step 1: Doing Good Research**
It is important to do thorough and efficient research. This includes keeping track of your research process (your ‘searches’) and the sources themselves.

Your research process refers to online searches you utilize to find sources. Much of the time you will be using library databases so use all their features. Did you know you can save sources directly from your searches without emailing or printing them? More on that below.

Your sources refer to scholarly articles found using databases, print and eBooks, web pages from websites, articles from online organizations, and so on.
Keeping track of both your search information and the sources themselves makes the writing process easier and helps you avoid plagiarism!

**Using Database Features**

Any time you use the TCC library databases, you can save sources directly from your searches in a folder. This is a useful option because we typically research on the go! A mistake students make that wastes time is doing the same search over and over because they forget what they have searched for previously. Here is how you can use this feature.

Databases typically have an **ACCOUNT** feature. If you sign up for an account, every time you use that database you can log in, and your sources will be there.

Let’s use EBSCO for our example. In the upper right, you should see a place to “Sign In.” Click on that.

Set up an account with user name and password. Then, sign in. When you do, you will notice your sign in information.
Next, do a search. Let’s search for Buffy the Vampire Slayer and look at the results. Okay, we’ve got two articles.

Now, notice the little blue folder on the far right for each source.

Let’s say I want to read these articles later because I don’t have time to print them. What should I do? Click on the blue folder.

When you do, you will notice your folder now has an item in it! You have officially saved that source for later.
When you come back to the database and log in, click on your yellow folder and you will see the item has been saved. See below!

Most databases will save tons and tons of sources. So if you are prone to researching on the go, using this feature will help you keep good track of your sources.

**Step 2: Reading Actively**

To read actively means to interact with the information while you read by underlining, highlighting, and taking notes.

Students typically make two mistakes with this step:

1) Over-highlighting or taking so many notes it is impossible to find anything during the writing phase, OR
2) Believing the reading process ends once you've read the sources one time!

The better you **KNOW** your sources by interacting with them, the less likely you are to plagiarize.

*The first time you read and annotate* (a fancy word for taking notes, highlighting, etc.) your sources, you want to **MARK ONLY THE MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION**. I suggest marking these ideas in pencil so you can erase later, which you will.
If the first read-through reveals promising information, the more likely you are going to use the source. So, the second time you read and annotate you can start making things more permanent, perhaps underling with pen and making notes in the margins.

The final time you read and annotate, you will be in the writing phase. Now you are starting to write your paper. For this read-through, you should be making decisions about what you will quote or paraphrase in your paper.

To do this, use a simple note-taking system, such as:
Y = Yes
M = Maybe
N = No

Or, if you are more visual, use “yellow” highlighter for “yes,” “blue” for “maybe” and “orange” for “no.”

Rather than having to continuously scan for information from your sources as you are writing your paper, you can go right to the parts you’ve identified. This step will help you make good use of your time. Further, it feels less overwhelming. If you are using even five sources, that can be hundreds of pages of information! Reading actively helps you avoid plagiarism because you know your sources well before you sit down to write.

Step 3: Paraphrasing or Quoting
Solid research papers use a mixture of paraphrases and direct quotations.

To paraphrase means to put the author’s ideas into your own words.

To directly quote means to use in your paper the exact wording of the author.

Remember that even when you paraphrase, you are required to refer to the author and page number wherein you LEARNED the
Students often think if they merely ‘shift’ the words around in a different order, then they are not plagiarizing. WRONG! Remember, when you use sources you are giving the author credit for her ideas, not merely her words.

Use a direct quotation when:
- You are trying to capture the style or voice of the author
- The author uses striking or amazing language
- You cannot put the idea into your own words

Use a paraphrase when:
- The information is summary rather than analysis
- The information is merely a statement of fact

A good rule to remember is if you can put the idea into your own words, you should!

Step 4: Citing Correctly

Using Citation Styles
Citing correctly first depends upon your knowledge of various citation styles. Do not rely on the computer to cite correctly because:

- The author may not be using the same citation style as the one you are using to write your paper.
- Copying and pasting may affect formatting, including where quotation marks or other punctuation is included.
- AND: The computer is not always right!

The only way to ensure that you have cited correctly is to ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS refer to your style manual, handout, or textbook.

The Writing Center has several excellent handouts on MLA and APA style.

Here is a comparison between the two most common citation styles and their features:
Use of date
- APA always uses date; MLA not parenthetically

Use of names
- APA only refers to last names and first initials; MLA sometimes uses first and last name and then just last name throughout

Use of direct quotations or paraphrases:
- MLA tends to use more direct quotations than APA

Identifying Plagiarism

Citing correctly also depends upon your ability to know plagiarism when you see it.

Read the following passages from articles. Then read the student’s attempt at using paraphrases and direct quotations in her/his paragraph. Which student has plagiarized?

From the source article:

Critical care nurses function in a hierarchy of roles. In this open heart surgery unit, the nurse manager hires and fires the nursing personnel. The nurse manager does not directly care for patients but follows the progress of unusual or long-term patients. On each shift a nurse assumes the role of resource nurse. This person oversees the hour-by-hour functioning of the unit as a whole, such as considering expected admissions and discharges of patients, ascertaining that beds are available for patients in the operating room, and covering sick calls. They are the most experienced of all the staff nurses. “The social context of critical care clinical judgment” by S.K. Chase (1995).

Student 1:

In her study of the roles of nurses in a critical care unit, Chase (1995) also found a hierarchy that distinguished the roles of experts and others. Just as the educational experts described above do not directly teach students, the experts in this unit do not directly attend to patients. That is the role of the staff nurses, who, like teachers, have their own “hierarchy of seniority” (p. 156). The roles of the
experts include employing unit nurses and overseeing the care of special patients (nurse manager), teaching and otherwise integrating new personnel into the unit (clinical nurse specialist and nurse clinician), and policy-making (nurse clinician).

Student 2:

Critical care nurses have a hierarchy of roles. The nurse manager hires and fires nurses. S/he does not directly care for patients. On each shift a resource nurse attends to the functioning of the unit as a whole, such as making sure beds are available in the operating room, and also has a patient assignment. The nurse clinician orients new staff, develops policies, and provides support. The clinical nurse specialist also orients new staff, mostly by formal teaching. The nurse manager, nurse clinician, and clinical nurse specialist, as the designated experts, do not take patient assignments.

Discussion
Student 1 has used the source information appropriately and correctly, thus she has NOT plagiarized. Notice how the student puts much of the information in her own words; it sounds like her. Also, any words or phrases she uses directly from the source – even just a couple words – she has put quotation marks around and mentioned a page number in parentheses. She has appropriately used APA style to cite her source.

Unfortunately, Student 2 has plagiarized. The student uses important language – hierarchy of roles, the nurse manager hires and fires, beds are available, etc. – directly from the source without using quotation marks or referring to page numbers. Most of these ideas could be articulated in the student’s own words (for instance: “the nurse manager hires and fires” could be conveyed as a paraphrase with employment of personnel is decided by the nurse manager. Unfortunately, Student 2 has plagiarized.

Here is another example. Has any student plagiarized? Which student has created the most successful paraphrase?
From the article:

The town responds by dressing up a slave in similar clothes to mock Tom’s sense of style.

**Student 1:** According to Thompson, when the town puts a slave in clothes like Tom’s, they essentially make fun of his choices (32).

**Student 2:** In order to mock Tom’s style, the town puts a slave in similar clothes (32).

**Student 3:** The town makes fun of Tom by dressing up a slave in like clothing.

Student 1 has created a pretty successful paraphrase. She mentions the author, conveys the ideas using her own language, and she refers to a page number in parentheses. Remember, a successful paraphrase still uses a page number because the idea is learned from the source.

Both Student 2 and Student 3 have plagiarized. Both use two or more words in the exact same way as the source – “to mock Tom’s…style” and “slave in similar clothes” – and “dressing up a slave.” The fact that Student 2 uses more direct language from the source without quoting it and Student 3 uses less, BOTH are still plagiarizing.
Step 5: Integrating Sources

Finally, smoothly integrating source information will also help you avoid plagiarism. Signal phrases are a clear indication of where your words end and the ideas and words of the author begin. Here are some tips:

o Do not ‘drop in’ quotes without surrounding language that introduces the quotation.

o Do not use quotations as first sentences of paragraphs. First sentences of paragraphs (also called topic sentences) are for main ideas. Use quotations as the supporting details in the middle portions of paragraphs.

o Do not insert quotations or paraphrases haphazardly or randomly. Write the main and supporting ideas of each paragraph and then utilize your quotations.

o Create variety when integrating source information by using signal phrases like “The author states” and/or parenthetical information, such as (Raymond 56).

Consider another student example.

This student is using the article, “Clo’es could do de like o’ dat”: Race, Place, and Power in Mark Twain’s The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson” by Garrett Nichols.

Here is a part of the article he would like to use as a source:

By acting out roles of the master/slave relationship, Roxy and Tom cement them into reality. Roxy’s subversive tactics succeed but at a price. Her enslavement becomes an expression of religious and motherly devotion (89).

And here is the paragraph where he wants to use the source:
Roxy is a faithful and devoted mother. However, at times she acts desperate and is willing to do whatever it takes. She trusts others with decisions that should be hers alone, and gives up her power in the process. Because she takes such risks, she loses her son in the end.

- Should he use all or part of the quotation?
- Where would the quotation work best in the paragraph?
- How might he integrate it into the surrounding language?

First, not all of the quotation from the source is relevant for the student’s paragraph. The most important parts are about how she is willing to “succeed but at a price” and about the “motherly devotion” (89) since the student’s paragraph is about motherhood. Sentence one is unnecessary, so the student doesn’t need to use it.

Second, the quotation works best after the sentence starting with “However.” The idea that Roxy is “willing to do whatever it takes” is supported by the idea from the source that she will “succeed but at a price” (89). Inserting the quotation there will also move nicely with what the student says after, about how she “gives up her power” and “takes such risks.”

These are the questions you, too, should ask yourself when writing your own papers. Avoiding plagiarism does not stop once you have your sources, or even once you choose the information from sources you want in your paper. Be vigilant all the way through the writing
process, especially about where and how you insert source information, to make sure you avoid plagiarizing.

**Final Tips about what Constitutes Plagiarism**

Claiming another’s whole paper as your own is plagiarism!

Claiming a part of another’s paper as your own, even a paragraph or single sentence, without appropriate in-text citation is plagiarism!

Failing to include author’s name, page number, date, or other required in-text information based on citation style (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) is plagiarism!

Changing the words around from the source when putting it in your paper without appropriate in-text citation is plagiarism!

Copying information incorrectly from the source (omitting or adding words, misspellings, etc.) into your paper is plagiarism!

Failing to put opening and closing quotation marks around source information is plagiarism!

Changing verb tenses, making singular nouns plural, or other alterations from the original source without indicating such changes with brackets or ellipses is plagiarism!

Remember, your teachers and the writing center team are here to help you understand the ins and outs of using sources ethically and correctly.

If you are ever in doubt about plagiarism, always ask! If you wait until right before your paper is due, it is too late! 😊

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