

The Writing Center & Reading/Study Skills Lab presents:

Tip Sheet on: Understanding Plagiarism

Diana Hacker, English language expert and author of *A Writer's Reference* stylebooks, explains that, "To borrow another writer's language or ideas without proper acknowledgment is a form of dishonesty known as plagiarism. This is a crucial matter, for if any language from your sources find its way into your final draft without quotation marks and proper documentation, you will be guilty of plagiarism, a serious academic offense." (257)

In Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference, 3rd Edition*, the author lists three acts that constitute plagiarism. They are:

1. Failing to cite quotations and borrowed ideas
 - all wording taken directly from a text must be in quotes. This includes full sentences (or longer) and phrases
 - ideas from a text must also be cited even if ideas are put in writer's own words
 - exceptions: common knowledge = information a reader can find in a general source because it is commonly known. *Note:* Common knowledge changes from field to field. Be sure to check with an expert or your professor as to what is considered common knowledge in your research area; remember a source may present information as common knowledge, but if you cannot find the same info in another source you will need to document it.
2. Failing to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks
 - quotations marks must be used around language taken directly from a text; failure to do so leads the reader to believe the language is that of the author (you!)
 - quotations marks are not just for full sentences or paragraphs; phrases must also be quoted within your writing
 - direct language without quotations or indented format within the text is plagiarism even if the text is cited at the end
3. Failing to put paraphrases or summaries in your own words
 - you must use your own language to restate an idea from a source
 - do not mix the author's phrases (without quotation marks) with your own words
 - you cannot replace the author's words or terms with synonyms

Indiana University at Bloomington <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/plagiarism> offers this method to judge plagiarism in a passage:

- when the idea has not been cited at all
- when a paraphrase has only replaced a few of the author's original words or changed the order of the sentences around
- when writer fails to quote and cite phrases from the author's original text

(Understanding Plagiarism, *cont.*)

Also from Indiana University at Bloomington , come hints for recognizing common knowledge.

- Common knowledge is information that can be found in numerous places and is known by many. *Ex. John F. Kennedy was elected President of the United States in 1960.* Because this is generally known, one doesn't need to document this fact.
- Writers must document facts that are not generally known and *ideas that interpret facts.* *Ex. According to the American Family Leave Coalition's new book, Family Issues and Congress, President Bush's relationship with Congress has hindered family leave legislation (6).* The idea that "Bush's relationship with Congress has hindered family leave legislation" is an interpretation; consequently, one must cite a source.

Teacher Michael L. Spears, <http://www.ehhs.cmich.edu/~mspears/plagiarism.html> simply states that plagiarism "is using someone's work without giving the appropriate credit." This can mean several things...

- Copying and pasting text from on-line media, such as encyclopedias.
- Copying and pasting text from any web site.
- Copying text from any printed material, such as books, magazines, or newspapers.
- Simply modifying text from any of the above sources. For example, replacing a few select words using a thesaurus does not constitute original work.
- Using photographs, video or audio without permission or acknowledgment. (You may use such a photographic, video or audio source with or in a paper or multimedia presentation that you create, as long as you do not profit from it or use it for any purpose other than the original assignment. You must include the source in your bibliography.)
- Using another student's work and claiming it as your own, even with permission, is academically unethical and is treated as plagiarism. This is known as "collusion" and is bad. Very bad...
- Acquiring work from commercial sources is academically unethical and is treated as plagiarism.
- Translation from one language to another is not using your own words. Translations fall under the guidelines for quotations, summaries and paraphrasing.
- Using an essay that you wrote for another class/another purpose without getting permission from the teacher/professor of both the current class and the class for which the original work was used is SELF-PLAGIARISM and is basis for consequence or penalty. You may use your previous work as a basis for new research of course, but include the original work in your bibliography.

MCC offers a *Writing Center & Reading/Study Skills Lab* at both the Bedford and Lowell campuses. Tutoring is available weekdays and some evenings, at no charge. Schedules are posted on the doors. Drop in or make an appointment.

In Bedford: AR 214, Tel: 781-280-3727 or 3728.

In Lowell: City Campus Room 406, Tel: 978-656-3364 or 3365.