

# Plagiarism Prevention Guidelines for Students

**Consult with your instructor or GSI.** If you have questions about when to cite a source in your paper, ask!

**Plan your paper.** Planning your paper well is the first and most important step you can take toward preventing plagiarism. If you know you are going to use other sources of information, you need to plan how you are going to include them in your paper. This means working out a balance between the ideas you have taken from other sources and your own, original ideas. Writing an outline or coming up with a thesis statement in which you clearly formulate an argument *about* the information you find will help establish the boundaries between your ideas and those of your sources.

**Take effective notes.** To avoid confusion about your sources, make sure you clearly distinguish, in your class and textbook notes, your own ideas from those you found elsewhere. Also, get in the habit of marking page numbers, and make sure that you record bibliographic information or web addresses for every source right away—trying to find that information at the last minute is a disaster!

**When in doubt, cite sources.** Of course you want to get credit for your own ideas. And you don't want your instructor to think that you got all of your information from somewhere else. But if it is unclear whether an idea in your paper really came from you or whether you got it from somewhere else and just changed it a little, you should always cite your source. Instead of weakening your paper and making it seem like you have fewer original ideas, this will actually strengthen your paper by: 1) showing that you are not just copying other ideas but are processing and adding to them, 2) lending outside support to the ideas that are completely yours, and 3) highlighting the originality of your ideas by making clear distinctions between them and ideas you have gotten elsewhere.

**Make it clear who said what.** Even if you cite sources, ambiguity in your phrasing can often disguise the real source of any given idea, causing inadvertent plagiarism. When you mix your own ideas with those of your sources, make sure that you clearly distinguish them. If you are discussing the ideas of more than one person, watch out for confusing pronouns. For example, imagine you are talking about Harold Bloom's discussion of James Joyce's opinion of Shakespeare, and you write: "He brilliantly portrayed the situation of a writer in society at that time." Who is the "he" in this sentence? Bloom, Joyce, or Shakespeare? Who is the "writer"? Joyce, Shakespeare, or one of their characters? Always make sure to distinguish who said what and give credit to the right person.

**Know how to paraphrase.** A paraphrase is a restatement of someone else's ideas in your own words. Changing a few words of the original sentences does not make your writing a legitimate paraphrase. You must change both the words and the sentence structure of the original, without changing the content. Also, you should keep in mind that paraphrased passages still require citation because the ideas came from another source, even though you are putting them in your own words. The purpose of paraphrasing is not to make it seem like you are drawing less directly from other sources or to reduce the number of quotations in your paper. It is a common misconception among students that you need to hide the fact that you rely on other sources. Actually it is advantageous to highlight the fact that other sources support your own ideas. Using quality sources to support your ideas makes them seem stronger and more valid. Good paraphrasing makes the ideas of the original source fit smoothly into your paper, emphasizing the most relevant points and leaving out unrelated information.

## Resources

Visit the websites below for more detailed information about plagiarism and preserving your academic integrity.

[LSA Student Academic Affairs](#)

[U-M Library Plagiarism Guide](#)