Plagiarism

> ***Plagiarism*** (play-je-riz-em), *noun*. The act or an instance of copying or stealing another's words or ideas and attributing them as one's own. -- ***plagiarize***, *verb* -- ***plagiarist***, *noun*.
>
> (*from* *Black's Law Dictionary*, 7th ed. St. Paul: West Group, 1999)

What is plagiarism?

To plagiarize is to use ideas or words in your writing that are not your own *without* acknowledging the source. Whether the source is a book or encyclopedia, a journal article or the Internet, plagiarism is a serious ethical offense that constitutes intellectual theft. At the College of St. Catherine, plagiarism is defined in *Leguide* as a Code of Conduct Violation *(see the current year's edition)* which may result in a failing grade for the paper or course involved.

Why does the College care about plagiarism?

Instructors assign students to write papers for many reasons. Writing papers may familiarize students with the research process, with developing and formulating theses and ideas, with analyzing and organizing information, and with using information gathered from a number of sources to come to logical conclusions. It is meant to encourage your educational development. Handing in papers that do not represent your own ideas undermines these goals.

What are some examples of plagiarism?

Much of the plagiarism that occurs in students' writing is unintentional, so it is important for you to understand exactly what constitutes plagiarism. (For more examples, please refer to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* 6th ed., 2003.)

1. Omitting documentation so that what you write appears to be your own creation.

   The following sentence is on page 66 of the *MLA Handbook*:

   > Plagiarism is sometimes a moral and ethical offense rather than a legal one since some instances of plagiarism fall outside the scope of copyright infringement, a legal offense.

   If the following sentence appeared in this paper, without any documentation, it would be plagiarism, since it conveys what is in *MLA Handbook* and does not credit it as the source of the information:

   > Plagiarism is not legally a copyright infringement, but it is a moral and ethical offense.

   In the following sentence, the source and page number of the information is given:

   > According to the *MLA Handbook*, plagiarism, while legally not a copyright infringement, is a moral and ethical offense (66).

2. Borrowing a specific term without acknowledging the source.

   The following sentence is on p. 90, of *The Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics*, vol. 4 (1998), by E.F. Paul:

   > Charges are litigated under what is called the "disparate treatment" model for employment discrimination suits.

   Plagiarized use of the passage:

   > Women suing for sexual harassment can claim they received "disparate treatment."

   An acceptable use the term and idea follows:

   > Women suing for sexual harassment can claim they received "disparate treatment" (Paul 90).

3. Handing in a paper you wrote and submitted for a grade in another course. While it may seem reasonable to do so, since you wrote the original paper, it is considered a form of cheating. Consult your instructor for permission to rework a paper to fit the requirements of a particular assignment.

4. Using, word for word, a paper, document or article you found on the World Wide Web. Some students are under the impression that if you find something on the Web, it is copyright-free and OK to use. In fact, you should treat these materials like you would printed books, and always acknowledge the sources of your information and ideas.

Your instructors are all aware of the presence of "term paper mills" on the Web, also known as Web TerM Paper siTeS, or Web TEMPTS. They know the ease with which students can locate, download or cut-and-paste essays and term papers. Resist the temptation; try to remember the goals of your assignment, and produce a paper of which you can be proud.

> *It is an old error of man to forget to put quotation marks when he borrows from a woman's brain!*
>
> *Anna Garlin Spencer,* Woman's Share in Social Culture *(1912)*

How can plagiarism be avoided?

1. Follow a process when writing a paper that includes: stating your thesis or topic clearly, in your own words; finding authoritative sources of information; taking notes on what you read, in your own words and using quotation marks on direct quotes; writing an outline; and writing a draft which includes credited resources as well as your own interpretations of the information you've collected.

2. Make sure you know the meaning of all of words you write, and don't try to "fool" your instructor. S/he is familiar enough with your writing style to know when something you write and submit is not your own work.

3. Learn when to document your sources. Remember to document all quotations, paraphrased information and ideas -– everything that you borrow from another source, material which might otherwise be mistaken for your own. When you are in doubt, it is safer to cite a source and not run the risk of plagiarizing.

(Of course, common sense will tell you that some information need not be cited. For example, you need not cite a fact that is commonly known, such as "The College of St. Catherine of St. Catherine was founded in 1905," or familiar proverbs, such as "The darkest hour is just before the dawn.")

4. Allow yourself plenty of time to research, gather resources, and write your paper. As you near the deadline for a paper, the temptation to plagiarize and take what may seem to be an "easy" way out may prove to be too great. Ask your instructor for an extension if you need it, and explain why.

5. Ask for help citing your sources if you need it. People to ask for help include librarians, writing assistants at the O'Neill Center, and your instructor.

> *Other writers have often put a thing more brilliantly, more subtly than even a very cunning artist in words can hope to emulate…what more tempting than to pin down such a moment with the blow of a borrowed hammer?*
>
> *Ethel Smyth,* Streaks of Life *(1922)*