

# Plagiarism and the proper use of sources

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With the raise of new information technology such as the internet, plagiarism has become epidemic in academia. Academic institutions such as UCSD have now started to react more forcefully to this threat. This leaflet is designed to help you understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, i.e. how to make proper use of sources and how to cite.

## 1 Definition of plagiarism

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, to ‘plagiarize’ means

1. to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own
2. to use (another’s production) without crediting the source
3. to commit literary theft
4. to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

According to U.S. law, stealing ideas or words is an act of fraud. The following is from <http://www.plagiarism.org>: “The expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property, and is protected by copyright laws, just like original inventions. Almost all forms of expression fall under copyright protection as long as they are recorded in some way (such as a book or a computer file).

“All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else’s work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit...

“Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism.” We will get back to this in a minute.

Note that both using somebody else’s **ideas** as well as **words** without citation constitutes plagiarism. This means that you have to acknowledge the sources not just of ideas you use in your essay, but *also of words*. It does not take an entire sentence or even just a clause, a much shorter string of words may be considered stolen if not put in quotation marks and properly referenced.

## 2 Types of plagiarism

This section is copied, in its entirety, from <http://www.plagiarism.org>.

Anyone who has written or graded a paper knows that plagiarism is not always a black and white issue. The boundary between plagiarism and research is often unclear. Learning to recognize the various forms of plagiarism, especially the more ambiguous ones, is an important step towards effective prevention...

### 2.1 Sources not cited

**‘The Ghost Writer’:** The writer turns in another’s work, word-for-word, as his or her own.

**‘The Photocopy’:** The writer copies significant portions of text straight from a single source, without alteration.

**‘The Potluck Paper’:** The writer tries to disguise plagiarism by copying from several different sources, tweaking the sentences to make them fit together while retaining most of the original phrasing.

**‘The Poor Disguise’:** Although the writer has retained the essential content of the source, he or she has altered the paper’s appearance slightly by changing key words and phrases.

**‘The Labor of Laziness’:** The writer takes the time to paraphrase most of the paper from other sources and make it all fit together, instead of spending the same effort on original work.

**‘The Self-Stealer’:** The writer ‘borrows’ generously from his or her previous work, violating policies concerning the expectation of originality adopted by most academic institutions [including UCSD].

### 2.2 Sources cited (but still plagiarized)

**‘The Forgotten Footnote’:** The writer mentions an author’s name for a source, but neglects to include specific information on the location of the material referenced. This often masks other forms of plagiarism by obscuring source locations.

**‘The Misinformer’:** The writer provides inaccurate information regarding the sources, making it impossible to find them.

**‘The Too-Perfect Paraphrase’:** The writer properly cites a source, but neglects to put in quotation marks text that has been copied word-for-word, or close to it. Although attributing the basic ideas to the source, the writer is falsely claiming original presentation and interpretation of the information...

**‘The Perfect Crime’:** Well, we all know it doesn’t exist. In this case, the writer properly quotes and cites sources in some places, but goes on to paraphrase other arguments from those sources without citation. This way, the writer tries to pass off the paraphrased material as his or her own analysis of the cited material.

For a list of FAQs (including answers), visit <http://www.plagiarism.org/ask-the-experts/faq>.

### 3 How plagiarism is treated at UCSD

Make no mistake: You will be asked to submit your essay to <http://www.turnitin.com>. This website runs a ‘similarity check’, i.e. it searches for matches of strings of words with everything in its database. This database includes every essay ever submitted to <http://www.turnitin.com> and everything available online. Note that this now includes most books and articles published in journals. **If there is a match, <http://www.turnitin.com> will find it.** It’s as simple as that. And if <http://www.turnitin.com> finds a match, you will be reported to the Academic Integrity Coordinator (AIC). If you are found guilty (and you will be, given the evidence from <http://www.turnitin.com>), this will be put on your confidential file, *even if it’s the first time you did it*. UCSD will release this confidential information if you waive your right to keep it confidential in your application to **Law Schools, Medical Schools**, or other **Professional** or **Graduate Schools**. Also, some branches of government require that you waive this right in order to be employable.

Let me say this as clearly as I can: **Even if you plagiarize only once, this may have serious consequences for your future.** Plagiarizing is not only immoral, it’s also irrational. It’s simply not worth it; the costs heavily outweigh the benefits. In fact, there will be no benefits, since you will be marked as an **automatic zero** on an assignment on which you plagiarized. Furthermore, once reported to the AIC, you can no longer drop the class. You are stuck with it and are very likely to fail it or get a low grade, given the zero for the assignment.

It is absolutely immaterial whether the act of plagiarism was committed intentionally or not. The law treats it the same, and so does UCSD in its policies and procedures concerning cheating. (UCSD policies on academic integrity) Ignorance never excuses a plagiarist. This is why you are right to read this document carefully.

### 4 How to make proper use of sources

You can’t write as concisely, as elegantly, as effortlessly as did Bertrand Russell. Don’t worry, neither can I. After all, he received a Nobel Prize in Literature and neither you nor I did or ever will. One of the major skills that you are expected to develop in a philosophy class is to express abstract ideas (of yourself and of others) **in your own words**. By doing this, you prove—or disprove—that you really understand what you talk about. To both credit their contributions to your thinking and to be honest about those who shaped your thinking, you must credit them—even if you’ve put the ideas in your own words! The ability to articulate highly abstract ideas is a great skill to have, and therefore to exercise, since it will do you good no matter what you will do after college. This is why I always ask you to use your own wording. Stealing other people’s words or paraphrasing them too closely defeats this purpose.

**As a general rule, whenever you make use of an idea or an argument from a book or a journal or a website or a conversation with someone else, you must include a reference to the source.** I am not fussy about which particular format you choose for references and for the bibliography. But references must be unique and consistent and must contain all information that is necessary for me or a stranger to identify the source and find it in the library or online.

Second, if you use the particular wording by someone else, you must either indicate that it is quotation by putting the relevant text in quotes or setting it apart in a separate block with larger indentation. You must then give the precise reference for the quote, either in parenthesis or a footnote.

For more information on how to cite, visit <http://www.plagiarism.org/citing-sources/overview/>. For examples of how to properly incorporate the ideas of others in your own writing, see <http://www.plagiarism.org/citing-sources/how-to-paraphrase>.

## Further information

A great resource, on which I have drawn heavily, is <http://www.plagiarism.org/>. Another great resource, in particular on documenting sources, is Purdue University's Online Writing Lab at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/>.

For general tips and techniques to write a good philosophy paper, I can recommend three sources:

1. Peter Lipton, 'Writing philosophy', at <http://www.hps.cam.ac.uk/research/wp.html> (Quote: "Style is the feather in the arrow, not the feather in the cap")
2. James Pryor, 'Guidelines on writing a philosophy paper', <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>
3. Manuel Vargas, 'How to write philosophy papers that don't suck', <http://www.usfca.edu/fac-staff/mrvargas/Handouts/Howtowrite.pdf>

UCSD's Academic Integrity Office entertains a website at [http://www.ucsd.edu/current-students/\\_organizations/academic-integrity-office/](http://www.ucsd.edu/current-students/_organizations/academic-integrity-office/). Its Policy on Integrity of Scholarship can be found at <http://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/policy.html>.

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