

Philosophy Department Guidelines Regarding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of another person's writings, ideas, insights, analyses and arguments without giving proper credit to the original source. It is a growing problem at universities, much of it resulting from students relying too heavily on the internet. The *Academic Code of Honor Handbook* discusses plagiarism as a specific violation of the Honor Code on pages 9-11. All students writing papers are strongly encouraged to re-read this section of the *Handbook*. However, some students have asked for additional guidance regarding plagiarism which this guide is designed to provide. Even if you think you fully understand plagiarism, you should carefully read this document. Ignorance of the policy will be no excuse if you should inadvertently commit an act of plagiarism.

You may think that plagiarism only happens when someone directly copies from another source without any citation. However, plagiarism can occur in a variety of different ways. Here are some of the more common forms.

1. Directly copying from any other source, such as a book, article or a website, without using quotation marks.

Explanation: This is plagiarism even if you include a reference after the passage. Why? Because you are claiming to have used another source only for information, but in truth you used it to provide the actual wording. Since you are using not just another's ideas, but also their writing style (a process that requires no understanding of the material or composition skills), this needs to be signified with quotation marks.

2. Somewhat rewording a passage, changing the occasional word and/or rearranging the sentence structure. In short, very closely paraphrasing another's writing.

Explanation: This is probably one of the most common and insidious forms of plagiarism. It can still qualify as a violation of the honor code even if you provide a citation. The reason is this: Even when you are writing a full-blown research paper, professors expect you to do at least two things: a) acquire a greater understanding of the material as a result of your research, and b) organize and express this enhanced understanding through your writing. This expression may indeed incorporate the ideas or analyses of other sources. However, when you closely paraphrase someone else's writing, you can actually bypass *both* understanding the material *and* figuring out how to synthesize and present it. Instead, your energy is devoted to the linguistic task of just rewording what is before you – a job that requires little more than basic knowledge of language and a good thesaurus. When you do this, even when citing the source, you are misrepresenting your comprehension of the material and pretending to have composed something you haven't. If you must lean quite heavily on another source while writing some part of your paper, then it is better to simply provide a lengthy quotation.

How do you know if you are leaning too heavily on another source? For most assignments, it should be possible to write the bulk of your paper without other sources directly before you. The writing process should be driven by your own grasp of the issues, something that resulted from your *prior* research. Periodically, as the need arises to integrate the ideas of others in your writing, you may need to turn to other sources for quotations and citations. But most of your writing should not require the direct consultation of other sources.

3. Adopting the ideas or analyses of other writers (though not their writing) without proper citation.

Explanation: When professors read your papers, one of the things they look for is not just comprehension of the material, but the ability to say something about it. Most professors want to see that you have reflected on the topic enough to construct your own analysis. When you take analyses, ideas, commentary and arguments from other writers without proper citation, you are deceiving your reader by creating the impression that you came up with this on your own.

However, there are some claims that you may have learned that don't require any sort of citation

when reproduced in your paper. These are the very basic “common knowledge” claims about a given subject that are available from several sources and were probably included as part of the course readings and lectures. Claims like, “Aristotle was an influential philosopher” or “Hard determinists deny that humans have freedom” are so uncontroversial and elementary that no one will take these as expressions of your own unique analysis. These sorts of claims do not go beyond general platitudes, so they will not be taken to reflect special understanding of the material. However, if you read somewhere a more evaluative claim that expresses a unique analysis like “Aristotle had far less influence on Aquinas than most commentators suppose” or “Hard determinists misunderstand the real nature of freedom”, then the adoption of such a claim in your paper requires you to give proper credit. Claims like these express a special perspective on the subject, and so require deeper comprehension. Without citing your source of such ideas, you are taking credit for the hard work of another person. Students new to a field of study may at times not know whether or not something counts as “common knowledge”. When in doubt, cite your source. You can also consult with your instructor if you have questions.

To illustrate these points, suppose you are doing a paper on the nature of the mind and decide to use the following imaginary website excerpt:

While all forms of dualism agree that some aspect of the mind is non-physical, there is considerable disagreement about which mental states or properties are not part of the physical realm. For example, some dualists claim it is the qualitative dimension of the mind – the “raw feeling” that accompanies pains, tickles, emotional states, and other sensations. Other philosophers claim it is the representational character of our beliefs and thoughts – the fact that they are *about* something else. However, the most convincing case for dualism focuses on the subjective nature of consciousness itself, which pertains to both feelings and thoughts. (Jones, 2003, Notre Dame Example of Plagiarism, URL=www.don'tcheat.com).

If you copy any part of this passage without providing a citation *and* quotation marks around the copied material, then you have committed plagiarism. Different professors may ask for different citation styles. In most cases, it would probably be sufficient to do something like this:

“ . . . the most convincing case for dualism focuses on the subjective nature of consciousness itself, which pertains to both feelings and thoughts” (Jones, 2003).

Then you would list the full reference for the website, including the URL, on a separate reference page:

Jones, W. (2003), Notre Dame Example of Plagiarism; URL=www.don'tcheat.com.

Now suppose that instead of copying the website, you reword this passage in the following way:

While there is considerable disagreement about which mental states or properties are not part of the physical realm, all types of dualism agree that some aspect of the mind is not physical. For instance, some dualists claim it is the qualitative aspect of the mind – the “raw feels” that go along with pains and tickles and other sensations. Other dualists claim it is the representational nature of beliefs and thoughts – that is, the fact that they are about something besides themselves. However, the most compelling reason for believing dualism looks closely at the subjective aspect of consciousness itself, and this applies to both feelings and thoughts (Jones, 2003).

Even though you cite the relevant source, this would still be a violation of the honor code because you didn't simply glean some information from this site and then incorporate it in your paper. Instead, you used the website to provide a point-by-point composition blueprint, and your own writing is only a syntactic variant of what is in the site. If you are going to lean this heavily on what is written, then you should just quote directly from the website.

Suppose instead that you had used this passage in this way:

Some have argued that it is the subjective character of consciousness that provides the best support for dualism (Jones, 2003). However, I will now argue that it is the existence of our free will that offers the best avenue of support for dualism.

Here the website is properly cited as a source of a substantive claim, but it is not used as a template for paper writing. This is fully appropriate.

Finally, suppose you use the website in this manner:

While dualists often look at the qualitative or representational character of the mind to defend their core thesis that the mind is non-physical, the strongest reason for being a dualist stems from the subjective dimension of consciousness itself.

While it is less clear that this passage exploits the website as a writing template, it uses a specific and substantive claim from the website that reflects in-depth understanding and a specific perspective on the topic. Consequently, the use of this claim requires a reference to the website. Without the citation, this would be a case of plagiarism.

However, suppose you had merely claimed this:

Dualists maintain that the mind is, in some way, non-physical.

Although the same claim is made in the website, it would not need to be cited because it is a very basic, exegetical, commonly acknowledged statement that advances nothing new or insightful. Since it merely reiterates the common definition of dualism, it needn't be cited.

Basic Points To Bear In Mind Regarding Plagiarism:

- ? **The internet is generally a poor source of information because there are no mechanisms of quality control; anyone can develop a website and claim to be an expert on some subject.**
- ? **Students are blind to how obvious it often is when they borrow from another source. Professors are likely to be familiar with many alternative sources of information, both online and in print.**
- ? **It is a violation of the honor code to use your own writing in more than one class without explicit permission.**
- ? **It is a violation of the honor code to use any other student's paper in a manner that violates the conventions described here.**
- ? **Proper quotation and citation procedures are presented in reference works such as the *Chicago Manual of Style* and *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*.**
- ? **It often proves to be more work to commit an act of plagiarism and conceal it than it is to simply write an honest paper.**
- ? **If you find yourself in a bind, talk to your professor. Most of them would prefer to work something out with you rather than spend time investigating plagiarism.**

? **Plagiarism is an ugly form of dishonesty -- it is lying about your own accomplishment. It is no better than taking credit for the work of others or falsifying your own credentials to get ahead. What would you think of someone who progressed past others by telling lies about his or her achievements? If you commit plagiarism, you *are* that person.**

WHEN IN DOUBT, ALWAYS PROVIDE THE CITATION!!!