Factsheet

Avoid plagiarism

Basics

Plagiarism means using someone else's ideas in your writing and pretending they are your own. In all forms of writing, plagiarism is regarded as unacceptable, since it involves both stealing (from another writer) and lying (about the source of your ideas).

The academic context

Plagiarizing is a serious misdemeanour in the academic world, because people's research and ideas are essential to their professional credibility, their career and their livelihood. People who steal material from other writers can be expelled from their academic institutions and may lose future opportunities to do academic work.

You need to be very careful in academic writing, because you will refer to other people's ideas a lot. To avoid plagiarizing them, you always have to say who the ideas belong to. This is called *citing*, or giving a *citation*. You have to cite your ideas whether they are from published material (e.g. a book or research paper) or unpublished material (e.g. what someone said in a lecture).

Key features

There are two parts to a typical citation: the citing phrase and the main idea.

1 Citing phrase

- To cite an idea, you need to use a citing phrase. A citing phrase introduces the idea by saying whose it is or where it comes from. The most common type of citing phrase has a reporting verb. Here are some examples of citing phrases (with reporting verbs highlighted):

  Watson's study demonstrates that …
  In Minima Moralia *(1951), Adorno argues that …*
  As Berlioz suggests, …
  Schalansky (2009) states that …

- You don't always need a reporting verb. A different type of citing phrase uses *according to*:

  According to the UNHCR Global Report *(2018), …*
  According to Whitehead and Russell (1910), …

2 Main idea

- After the citing phrase, you need to give the idea you are citing. You can do this in two ways: with a paraphrase or with a direct quote.

Paraphrase

- A paraphrase states what someone else has said using your own words. For example:

  In Minima Moralia *(1951), Adorno argues that the life of the mind has been radically circumscribed and damaged by modern culture.*

- A paraphrase is very useful if you want to summarize something or go into more detail. Paraphrases help you to pace and structure your writing in your own way, rather than having to just follow other people's thoughts.
- See ***Paraphrase*** from the *C21 Academic Skills* series for more details.

Direct quote

- A direct quote uses the exact words the original author used. A direct quote is always inside quote marks (' ' or " "). For example:

  Hamadani (2017) suggests that, overall, 'the world is becoming a better place'.

- Direct quotes are very useful for stating the most important points another writer has made, or for giving unusual phrases that would be difficult to paraphrase. Generally speaking, you shouldn't directly quote too many long sections of text. For this reason, academic writers often insert a direct quote into a paraphrase. For example:

  Brock (2017) argues that, although employment figures in the UK are improving, the kinds of jobs people do now are without obvious meaning and leave people with 'no sense of purpose'.

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Challenges / difficulties

At times, it can be difficult to work out if you need a citation. If something is 'common knowledge' (i.e. most reasonably educated people would know it), then it might not be necessary to cite an idea. For example, academic writers wouldn't cite statements like *Paris is the capital of France*. Be careful, however: some kinds of common knowledge have only been established recently through extensive research – like global warming. This kind of fact still needs to be cited. And some 'common knowledge' is wrong! For example, the Great Wall of China cannot actually be seen from space. If you think there's any risk of plagiarism, error or misunderstanding, it's always best to check and provide a citation.

How can I develop this skill?

When you're reading books or articles for your course, look out for the citations. Read them carefully to familiarize yourself with the phrases writers use to refer to other material. Make a point of reading footnotes, too – it's easy to skim over these, but they are often used for more extensive citations.

Learning outcome

When you have mastered this skill, you will be adept at referring to other people's work in an academic style. You will know when to use direct quotes and when to paraphrase, and you will always cite your sources.

Theory to practice

Read the text. Match the numbered phrases to the features below.

Vaccine transportation

Broadway (2017) states that[1] the Isobar, a vaccine refrigerator small enough to be carried in a backpack, is 'able to maintain stable temperature control for around six days'.[2] This innovation is important because, although you can easily store vaccines in a normal fridge,[3] it is much harder to keep them at the precise temperature required when they are being transported in small quantities on foot. This final 'walking phase' is essential to the distribution of vaccines in many parts of the world.[4] Previously, iceboxes have been used for this purpose; according to Broadway,[5] the guiding principle in the design of the Isobar was to create something comparable in weight to an icebox – i.e. light enough to be carried by an individual for about six miles – but far more reliable.[6]

a direct quote _____

b paraphrase _____

c direct quote embedded in paraphrase _____

d citing phrase _____ _____

e common knowledge _____

Ways to get more practice

Keep a list of citing phrases and reporting verbs, and add any new ones from texts you are reading. When you are writing, challenge yourself to include new phrases from your list.

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