

Avoiding Plagiarism

Most students would never intentionally steal objects. All too often, however, they steal another writer's ideas and words—they plagiarize. Always use your own words and generously credit your sources.

Be careful when you use research that others have done. Only information that is widely available from a variety of sources—such as historic facts and geographic data—can be used without giving credit.

For example, if you were writing a research paper on earthquakes and you wanted to compare California earthquakes to others throughout history, you could find and use the dates and locations of other major earthquakes without referencing a specific source because similar information is available from any number of sources. If, however, you wanted to use a person's story about an earthquake, an analysis of the cause of an earthquake, or even a description of an earthquake, you would have to give credit to your source.

To serve as an example, this is an original paragraph from Joan Delfattore's book.

In the Dick and Jane readers some of us remember from our childhoods, a family consisted of a married couple, two or three well-behaved children, and a dog and a cat. Father wore suits and went out to work; mother wore aprons and baked cupcakes. Little girls sat demurely watching little boys climb trees. Home meant a single-family house in a middle-class suburban neighborhood. Color the lawn green. Color the people white. Family life in the textbook world was idyllic; parents did not quarrel, children did not disobey, and babies did not throw up on the dog.

Joan Delfattore, *What Johnny Shouldn't Read—Textbook Censorship in America*

The following three paragraphs illustrate common ways Delfattore's paragraph is plagiarized.

In the Dick and Jane Readers some of us remember from our childhoods, a family consisted of a married couple, two or three well-behaved children, and a dog and a cat. Father wore suits and went out to work; mother wore aprons and baked cupcakes. Little girls sat demurely watching little boys climb trees. **Plagiarized.**

Problem: *This has been directly copied without quotation marks or credit to the author.*


According to Delfattore, the Dick and Jane readers of several years ago pictured an unrealistic family life. Stories always seemed to take place in middle-class suburban neighborhoods where life was idyllic; parents never quarreled and children always obeyed. **Plagiarized.**

Problem: *Although portions have been paraphrased and credit has been given to the author, quotation marks are still needed around the copied portion.*


In the past, elementary school reading books told stories of an unrealistic life style. Families always lived in suburbia where homes and life were picture-perfect. **Plagiarized.**

Problem: *Although this has been paraphrased, credit has not been given to the author.*

Professional writers always credit their sources unless they are absolutely certain their information is available from a wide variety of references; you should too. General guidelines:

 *Use quotation marks and credit the source when you copy exact wording.*

 *Use your own words—paraphrase instead of copying—when possible.*

 *Give credit for words and ideas that aren't your own, even if you paraphrase.*

"The most important advice I can offer," says Myrick Land, "is this: Remember that you are a writer, not a compiler of previously published material. Although you will consult other writers, frequently for facts and background information, the value of your writing will depend on your own contribution."

- References: Donald Bower, editor: The Professional Writer's Guide, The National Writer's Club, 1990.
Ellen M. Kozak, "The ABCs of Avoiding Plagiarism," Writer's Digest, July 1993.
Myrick E. Land: Writing for Magazines 2nd ed., Prentice Hall, 1993.

Put these strategies into practice with the worksheet on the reverse side.

Practice: Avoiding Plagiarism

Rewrite these paragraphs. *Quote when appropriate, paraphrase when possible, and credit when necessary. Check your rewrites with your instructor or tutor.*

“We as a society are caught in an information technology paradox: Information technology is thriving in a society that may not be ready for it.

Some of us want to wrap ourselves in information technology. Some of us want nothing to do with it. Most of us want it, but in moderation. This reluctant acceptance of information technology has resulted in many information technology-based opportunities being overlooked or ignored. For whatever reasons, business, government, and education have elected not to implement computer applications that are well within the state of the art computer technology. Literally thousands of cost-effective information technology-based systems are working in the laboratory and, on a small scale, in practice; however, society’s pace of information technology acceptance has placed such applications on the back burner.” Long, Larry and Nancy Long. “The Information Technology Paradox,” *Computers*, 4th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1996, p. ISS2.

“The word violence has a generally negative connotation; it has been defined as ‘behavior designed to inflict injury to people or damage property’ (Graham & Gurr, 1969, p. xiv). It may be considered legitimate or illegitimate, depending on who uses it and why and how it is used. Some special uses of violence, particularly in athletic activities like football and hockey, are so socially accepted that they are usually perceived not as violence but as healthy and even character-building behaviors.” Kornblum, William and Joseph Julian, “Violence,” *Social Problems*, 8th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1995, p. 199.

“The age of the average U.S. worker has gradually increased over the past few decades. As you might expect, this increase is the result of older workers and fewer younger workers. Americans are living longer than ever before, and some older individuals are taking advantage of changes in retirement laws and continuing to work beyond age 65. More important, however, is the so-called baby bust generation, those individuals born after the baby boom of the immediate post-World War II period. ...

This trend has affected businesses in two ways. First, older workers tend to put greater demand on a company’s health insurance, life insurance, and retirement benefit programs. And second, younger workers taking the places of retirees tend to want different things from employers—things like more opportunities for self-expression or more leisure time.” Griffin, Ricky W. and Ronald J. Ebert, “The Graying Workforce,” *Business*, 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1993, p. 61.

“A compelling reason to preserve species is that each one plays an important role in an ecosystem—an intricate network of plant and animal communities and the associated environment. When a species becomes endangered, it indicates that something is wrong with the ecosystems we all depend on. Like the canaries used in the coal mines whose deaths warned miners of bad air, the increasing numbers of endangered species warns us that the health of our environment has declined. The measures we take to save endangered species will help ensure that the planet we leave for our children is as healthy as the planet our parents left for us.” United States Fish and Wildlife Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, *Endangered Species*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1994.