

# Plagiarism

Deliberate plagiarism is the equivalent of theft, except that the stolen object is not tangible, like a car, but intangible: an idea. If you steal a car, you may be thrown in jail; if you steal an idea, you may be thrown *out* of university.

## 1. Definition

The University of New Brunswick's Undergraduate Calendar defines plagiarism as follows:

1. quoting verbatim or almost verbatim from a source (such as copyrighted material, notes, letters, business entries, computer materials, etc.) without acknowledgment;
2. adopting someone else's line of thought, argument, arrangement, or supporting evidence (such as, for example, statistics, bibliographies, etc.) without indicating such dependence;
3. submitting someone else's work, in whatever form (film, workbook, artwork, computer materials, etc.) without acknowledgment;
4. knowingly representing as one's own work any idea of another.

-- (2009-2010 UNB *Undergraduate Calendar* 42)

In general, plagiarism is taking credit for someone else's ideas. To avoid plagiarism, you must document in your assignments the passages, ideas, or words that are not your own. Formats and rules for documentation vary widely; consult the appropriate style guide and, of course, your instructor. Remember that documents on the Internet can be traced more easily than can printed sources; even short passages can be identified using current software.

## 2. Accidental Plagiarism

Accidental plagiarism is actually common. Many students do not realize that citation may not be enough: Even if you cite the source, not using quotation marks to identify borrowed words is *still* plagiarism. When not only the thought but also the words are substantially those of the original, quotation marks *must* be used *as well* as a citation. Consider this passage:

Where the narrative does pass judgement is on those whose attempts at authenticity only expose their inauthenticity. Witness, for example, the town's false concern for Rita as the wife of an unemployed drinker; the false interest in Joe's sobriety and employment; the false fronts that hide dissatisfaction with life because of choices made or steps not taken; and the false assumption that to "be quite different" from that which one dislikes is to "be better" than that which one despises. (43)

(Source: Pennee, Donna. "Still More Social Realism: Richards's Miramichi." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 41 (1990): 41-45.)

Judge whether the sentence below is a fair use of the source material:

**Pennee comments that Richards does pass judgement on those whose attempts at being authentic expose their inauthenticity (43).**

The passage contains plagiarism: Too much of the wording of the original is preserved. The phrases in italics (below) are unmarked quotations. Even though the source is indicated, the direct quotations have not been indicated, and this too is plagiarism! When the wording and thought are substantially those of the original, quotation marks *must* be used!

Original:

**Where the narrative *does pass judgement is on those whose attempts at authenticity only expose their inauthenticity (43).***

Unacceptable paraphrase:

**Pennee comments that Richards *does pass judgement on those whose attempts at being authentic expose their inauthenticity (43).***

### 3. What is common knowledge?

Apart from your own original ideas, the only information in your paper that does not require documentation is **common knowledge**. Common knowledge is a slippery concept usually defined (quite loosely) in relation to a particular field. It includes the following:

- historical dates,
- scientific principles,
- technical terms of a discipline.

There can, of course, be disputes about such facts. If you use an authority to settle the matter, cite it! Be alert for *interpretation* as well. It may be a fact that Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949, but the following example clearly involves an interpretation for which a source must be cited:

**Newfoundland, seduced by the massive military spending during World War II, was persuaded to join Confederation in 1949.**

Remember: any *interpretation* of agreed-upon fact automatically leaves the realm of common knowledge and must be documented.

### 4. What are the penalties?

The penalties for plagiarism vary. Usually, if the plagiarism is clearly accidental, the student is simply required to re-submit the work in question. Deliberate plagiarism can be punished by a failing mark on an assignment, failure in the associated course, suspension from a program, and even expulsion. In all cases, a temporary or permanent note is added to the student's record. Ironically, few plagiarized pieces receive particularly good grades, even if the plagiarism goes unnoticed. Thus, the risks are increasingly high, the penalties are severe, and the actual benefits are minimal. Plagiarism is a waste of time.