

Plagiarism: Avoiding the Greatest 'Academic Sin'

Updated for the Writers Lab by Sherri Wahrer



Many of your classroom experiences here at BGSU will involve learning what others have written and then integrating those ideas with your own. However, in academic writing, any ideas or language not credited to an outside source are assumed to be the author's. The issue of plagiarism arises when you fail to credit ideas and language that aren't yours. The word plagiarism, which originated from a Latin word meaning to kidnap, refers to the unacknowledged use of another's words, ideas, or information. Below you will find guidelines for acknowledging (or not acknowledging) information, plus a few examples of more obscure forms of plagiarism. If you're ever unsure of whether or not you should credit an outside source within a paper you're writing, ask your instructor; it's better to be safe than sorry!

What Need Not Be Acknowledged or Credited?

- Common knowledge - If most readers, like yourself, would likely know the information, you need not cite a source for it.
- Facts available in many sources - If a number of textbooks, encyclopedias, almanacs, etc. include the information, you need not cite a source for it.
- Your own ideas and discoveries - After all, your instructor is most likely looking for your original ideas and propositions.

What Must Be Acknowledged or Credited?

- Any direct quotation - The exact words quoted must be placed in quotation marks.
- Paraphrases and summaries that present background information, present facts not commonly-known, and explain various positions/opinions on your topic need to be credited.
- Arguable assertions - When an author presents a point or opinion, irregardless of its truth, credit him/her.
- Statistics, charts, tables, and graphs put together by someone else need to be credited.

Other Forms of Plagiarism

- Purchasing an already-written essay
- Employing someone to write the essay for you
- Submitting the same essay for two classes without consulting the instructor(s)
- Turning in an essay written previously for the course (a hand-me-down)

Penalties for plagiarism can range from failure on the essay to failure in the course to suspension/expulsion from BGSU. Read the Academic Honesty section of your Student Handbook for more information.