



THE UNIVERSITY  
WRITING CENTER  
3211 HHRA BUILDING

## AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

**THE PRINCIPLE:** Here's how the UNCG Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism:

**Plagiarism:** Intentionally or knowingly representing the words of another, as one's own in any academic exercise. Plagiarism may occur on any paper, report, or other work submitted to fulfill course requirements. This includes submitting work done by another, whether a commercial or non-commercial enterprise, including web sites, as one's own work.

The penalties for plagiarism are serious; it is definitely something you want to avoid! (See <http://studentconduct.uncg.edu/policy/academicintegrity/>).

### **THE PROBLEM:**

The most obvious example of plagiarism would be turning in a paper written, even partially, by another person. An equally serious infraction would involve cutting and pasting a few sentences or paragraphs here and there from an online source without attribution. *Don't do it!!* (Even if no author is listed on a Web site, SOMEONE other than you wrote it, and if you use *any part of it* in a paper, you are obligated to direct your readers to the original source.)

But here's another, more common and more subtle form of plagiarism: *unacceptable paraphrasing*. Some students think they can use the information or ideas from a print or online source without citing it, as long as they change the wording of the original. WRONG!!!

### **THE SOLUTION:**

Here's what you need to do in order to avoid plagiarism:

- 1) Anytime you use the exact words of a source (even if it's just a few well-chosen words from a sentence), put quotation marks around those words and cite the source.
- 2) Anytime you use the information or ideas of another writer (unless it is common knowledge reported by a number of different sources), cite the source, even if you put it into your own words.

Restating someone else's information or ideas in your own words, or *paraphrasing*, is a good way to keep the style of a paper consistent (it will be your style), to show your understanding of the material, and to avoid having your paper look like a scrapbook full of quotations. BUT you must paraphrase properly. Here's how:

- 1) Use your own language and writing style; do NOT simply substitute a few synonyms or make minor changes in the sentence structure or word order of the original.
- 2) Cite the source, using whatever citation system is appropriate in your course (such as APA, MLA, CMS, etc. – see note at end).
- 3) Be sure to restate the information or ideas accurately; don't change the meaning.

\* \* \*

To demonstrate what is and is not acceptable paraphrasing, we start with an original source: two sentences directly quoted from page 39 of an article entitled “Best in Class,” by Margaret Talbot, from *The New Yorker* of June 6, 2005:

**At one time, it was obvious who the best students in a school were. But now the contenders for the valedictorian title, especially at large, top-performing suburban high schools, are numerous and determined.**

Compare that original to these attempts at paraphrasing:

- 1) **UNACCEPTABLE PARAPHRASE.** This is *plagiarism*, even though the author is identified, because the language is too close to the original:  
There was a time when it was obvious who were the best students in a school. But today, especially at large, highly-rated suburban high schools, the contenders for the title of valedictorian are determined and numerous (Talbot 39).
- 2) **UNACCEPTABLE PARAPHRASE.** This one is unacceptable because it is *inaccurate*. Margaret Talbot wouldn't want credit for this – we've completely changed her meaning!  
It has never been easy to tell who should be valedictorian. But now the winners of the title in most big city high schools are easy to spot because they are determined to be top performers (Talbot 39).
- 3) **EXCELLENT PARAPHRASE.** Language is changed significantly, but meaning is preserved, and citation is correct:  
These days, competition for the honor of being named valedictorian is strong at many of the country's most prestigious high schools. It's not like the past, when there was no question about which students were the best (Talbot 39).
- 4) **EXCELLENT COMBINATION OF PARAPHRASE AND QUOTATION.** A key phrase is quoted directly, while the rest of the passage is paraphrased adequately and accurately:  
It may have been easier in the past to determine who should be named class valedictorian. But in some high schools today conflict arises because the candidates are “numerous and determined” (Talbot 39).

## SUMMARY: HOW TO PARAPHRASE WITHOUT PLAGIARIZING:

- 1) Read the original source carefully to be sure you understand it.
- 2) Don't just highlight the important passages. Take notes on them so your mind is processing the material.
- 3) When it's time to use the material in your paper, *put the original out of sight!* If you keep looking at it while you are writing, it will be hard to avoid using almost exactly the same words and sentence structure as the original.
- 4) Check your paraphrase against the original to be sure you haven't distorted the meaning. If you need to use certain phrases from the original, that's fine; just put quotation marks around them. (An exception here would be technical terms that are the common vocabulary of the field, and that really can't be changed; you can use them without quotation marks.)
- 5) *Cite your source!*

NOTE: To cite your sources properly, you will need to include notations both in your text and in a complete reference list at the end of the paper. The correct format for both steps depends on which citation system you are using, which in turn usually depends on the discipline for which you are writing the paper. The most commonly used systems are the APA, MLA, Chicago, and CBE. If you don't know which one to use, ask your professor.

An excellent website containing information about using each of these systems is [www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/](http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/)

Many grammar handbooks contain sections on Documenting Sources which will give you most of the necessary information on any of these four major systems.

If you want to go straight to the most complete information, you can ask for any one of these in the Reference Department of Jackson Library:

*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.

*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed.

*Scientific Style and Format*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., a publication of the Council of Biology Editors

*The Chicago Manual of Style: The Essential Guide for Writers, Editors, and Publishers*, 14<sup>th</sup> ed.