

UNCG



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.

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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.

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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).