

DukeWrites Enrichment Suite

Academic integrity, part two

With Rene Caputo, Duke ESL Specialist

So, some of my international students have told me that in their classes back home they were told that they could use a certain percentage of work that was not their own. Or a certain number of words in a row, or consecutive words.

In the U.S., this is simply not true. There is no safe percentage that you can borrow, or as some people might say, steal, from other people's works and be safe from being accused of plagiarism.

There is absolutely no percentage and there is no number of consecutive words. So, it might be that you use only five consecutive words from someone else's work, but they're very distinctive and different from your style of writing. And you might be accused of plagiarism.

So, what are some reasons that a writer might plagiarize? I'm sure you can think of some. Here are some that come to mind for me.

One is simply that a writer makes a decision. I'm not going to take the time and energy to work on this assignment. I'm just going to take someone else's work. This is very blatant plagiarism. And just like all other forms of plagiarism, you do not want to do it.

Another reason might be that a writer is working on an assignment and realizes oh, I just don't have enough time. Or just runs out of energy and confidence. Oh my goodness, I've tried my hardest. I think it's terrible; I'm going to take someone else's work.

Do not let any of these reasons cause you to commit plagiarism. You are putting your academic life at Duke in jeopardy if you make any of these choices.

With international students or people from other cultures, another problem is simply not understanding the U.S. rules. And I certainly hope that this lesson will help you with that.

Other students might understand the rules but make the decision to commit plagiarism anyway. Finally, I believe that some students do not think the professor or editor or whoever is in charge will notice the plagiarism. Do not count on that.

I have found plagiarism in my students' writing in the past and I have also noticed plagiarism in the writing of students in other classes...whose writing I don't know at all.

So, what are some ways that you can avoid trouble with plagiarism? I think the most important one is for you to really learn what plagiarism is. What does that mean in the United States?

Another piece of that is understanding why citing your sources, telling someone where that information, those words, those ideas came from is not necessarily enough. It's a very detailed process.

So here we go. So, of course to stay out of trouble with plagiarism you need to make a decision that you're never going to plagiarize. How can you help that to happen?

One, allow plenty of time for your assignments. Do not wait till the last minute. Do not put that pressure on yourself.

Make appointments with our Writing Studio tutors. They can help you at any stage of your assignment. And they can help you if you're concerned in a particular sentence or a paragraph, if you're concerned that you might have plagiarized. Go to them before you turn in the assignment and ask for help.

Finally, you need to take very careful notes when you read articles, website information, anything that you read that you might in someway use in your assignment. You need to take careful notes. And we'll look at that more.

So in the beginning, create some sort of system for yourself for taking notes. First you need to write down very precise information about your source: the author, what journal, what was the name of the piece, what year, what volume, what issue. Or put that information in citation software.

After you take notes or while you're taking notes, you want to be very clear. Did you write down notes that are exactly what the author wrote? Are your notes in your own words but using the author's sentence structures? Are your notes in your own words and sentence structure? These are very important pieces in your avoiding plagiarism later.

So, let's look at these two sentences. Which one of these sentences do you think might need a citation and why? Well, the first sentence, talking about Shakespeare and his famous play, Hamlet, would normally not need a citation. This is called common knowledge, something that many people would know. And so the reader does not have to know exactly where you read that, where did you find that information. They already know that information most likely, so you do not have to cite your source.

The second piece, however, you would normally want to provide a citation for. Your reader might wonder, "Hmm, is that really true? Where did that information come from? And what if I want to read more about that?" So often, for the second piece,

which would normally not be considered common knowledge, you would want to provide citation information.

So here is some information that I wrote down about where I found that fact about Greek residents. It's from the New York Times online site; I have the web address, the author, when it was published, and when I found it. This is information that you might need to create a citation.

In this presentation, we are not going to talk about the details of citation, but you can look at some of these sites online. I'm just showing two of them to you here. You can find those links in the What's More section of Sakai on Academic Integrity: Plagiarism.

And take a look. And see how you might create a citation with that information.

So, let's look at some more details of citations, things that would help you to know if you wanted to avoid committing plagiarism. Let's look at this paragraph.

In the first sentence, we have a citation that mentions Walker in 1998 and Biggs and Burville in 2003. What does that really mean?

From reading that, we know that the author of this paragraph, whose last name is Hall, as I've noted at the bottom of your slide, read some article or other piece that was written by Biggs and Burville in 2003. And that mentioned this idea that plagiarism has become a major issue of concern. That idea, however, came from Walker in 1998.

Notice that that sentence does not have quotation marks around it. When we don't see quotation marks there, we know that the author Hall put that idea in her own words and sentence structure. I'm sure that the original mentioned the word plagiarism, but some of the rest of it she created herself, so that she did not need to use quotation marks.

In the second sentence, we have Park 2003. Again, because we don't see quotation marks around that sentence we know that Hall, our author of the paragraph, read something by Park that was written in 2003. And she put those ideas into her own words and sentence structure for that sentence.

Continuing onward. I'd like you to take a few moments and take notes on this paragraph. And I'll see you back here.