

# OWLS Writing Guides: AVOIDING PLAGIARISM



Plagiarism is the use of someone else's ideas, words, or work without giving credit to the source. This handout should help you to determine when you need to cite your source, but when in doubt, always check with your professor.

## Material that must always be credited to its source:

- Words and ideas presented in another source
- Someone else's observations, insights, thoughts, reasoning, or conclusions about a subject
- Statistics and other specific factual information
- Words and ideas gathered from interviews that you conduct yourself
- Cartoons, photographs, diagrams, charts, graphs, illustrations, and other visuals not of your own creation
- Video or audio material that you use or repost from online or other electronic sources

## Material that you do not need to credit to a source:

- Accounts of your own experiences
- Your original observations, insights, thoughts, reasoning, or conclusions about a subject
- Results of your own lab work or experiments
- Your original creations: artwork, photographs, illustrations, videos, stories, songs, etc.
- Common knowledge: information that most people know or that can be found in most general references consulted about the subject (encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs). This information includes the following:
  - Facts that are beyond dispute ("There are 365 days in a year.")
  - Historical dates and other common facts of history ("George Washington was the first president of the United States.")
  - *Generally* known facts, terms, and concepts in a particular field of study *when you are writing in that field*. (the concept of *setting* in literary analysis)

<i>No documentation needed:</i>	<i>Documentation needed:</i>
The term <i>ego</i> in a paper for psychology class	The viewpoint of a psychologist who disputes Freud's ideas about the ego
The dates for the American Revolution, or the fact that the Colonies defeated the British	One historian's analysis of the causes of the Colonies' victory over the British
The fact that more and more people are using social media	Statistics or other specific data relating to the increasing use of social media; or the opinions, viewpoints, or analyses of this phenomenon offered by others

Examples from Seyler, *Read, Reason, Write*, 9<sup>th</sup> edition (2010, McGraw-Hill)

## **AVOIDING PLAGIARISM WHEN YOU QUOTE, PARAPHRASE, & SUMMARIZE SOURCES**

To avoid plagiarizing when you borrow material from a source, it is not enough simply to cite the source by telling your reader the author and name of the original work. You must pay attention to the rules of quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing, and use the documentation style appropriate for your class/discipline (e.g., MLA or APA).

### **ORIGINAL:**

“Because technology begets more technology, the importance of an invention’s diffusion potentially exceeds the importance of the original invention. Technology’s history exemplifies what is termed an autocatalytic process; that is, one that speeds up at a rate that increases with time, because the process catalyzes itself.” (Diamond, 1997, p. 301)

### **PLAGIARISM (exact words used without quotation marks):**

Technology begets more technology, so the importance of an invention’s diffusion potentially exceeds the importance of the original invention (Diamond, 1997).

*Even though this sentence is cited correctly using the author-date style (APA), it presents the exact language of the original passage without indicating such with quotation marks. **When you use the exact words of the source, you must enclose them in quotation marks.***

### **PLAGIARISM (too close to original language and sentence patterns):**

According to Diamond (1997), technology gives birth to more technology. As a result, the importance of the spread of an invention may exceed the importance of the invention itself. The history of technology shows what is called an autocatalytic process through which the invention of new technologies speeds up at an increasing rate because the process of change catalyzes itself.

*This sentence uses the same sentence structure as the source, merely substituting synonyms for some of the words. It does not differ significantly from the original. **When you paraphrase, you must restate the source idea not only in your own words, but in a sentence that is structured differently than the original sentence.***

### **ACCEPTABLE QUOTATION:**

According to Diamond (1997), “Because technology begets more technology, the importance of an invention’s diffusion potentially exceeds the importance of the original invention” (p. 301).

### **ACCEPTABLE PARAPHRASE:**

According to Diamond (1997), technology feeds on itself. One invention leads to another, and then to still more at a rate that increases with time. So what is most important about an invention may not be the invention itself but how quickly it spreads.

### **PARAPHRASE AND QUOTATION COMBINED (quoted words or phrases are put in quotation marks):**

According to Diamond (1997), technology feeds on itself through what he calls an “autocatalytic process” (p. 301). One invention leads to another, and then to still more at a rate that increases with time. So what is most important about an invention may not be the invention itself but how quickly it spreads.