Definition: **PLAGIARISM** from *The AMA Handbook of Business Writing*

The use of written or spoken material including paragraphs, sentences, artwork, or research statistics without providing credit is called **plagiarism**.

Plagiarism can be avoided by paraphrasing and rewriting and by providing credit in the form of sources or acknowledgments.

Sources for quotes, facts, or research can be cited immediately after a borrowed statement or idea.

**Example:** See *Documenting Sources* in Section 1: The Writing Process.

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**Summary Article: Plagiarism**

*From Encyclopedia of Social Problems*

To represent oneself as the author of some work that is in fact the work of someone else is to plagiarize. Plagiarism may include the “passing off” of the form of the work—for example, the exact words of a piece of writing—or the intellectual content, or both.

Plagiarism exists as a serious social problem within the halls of Western academia. Only exceptional circumstances bring plagiarism of someone outside of academia to public attention. Plagiarism is an ethical, not a legal, issue and it does not equate with the breaking of copyright or patents, though at times both may also involve plagiarism. The advent of the World Wide Web and vast electronic databases brought this issue to the fore within academic institutions, resulting in new methods of both plagiarism and detection. The global nature of the Web and the increase in transcultural education through the movement of students and scholars increased awareness of a cultural dimension to plagiarism.

**Types of Plagiarism**

The seriousness of plagiarism and its problematical nature rests on the likelihood that each instance is a deliberate act of deception. The simple definition of “passing off” therefore expands to consideration of how the material was “passed off,” by whom, and for what purpose. Plagiarism thus falls into three main types, depending on the original author’s level of awareness of intent to deceive.

**Author Is Aware of Deception**

*Work on Behalf.* The author of the work gives or sells the original work to another who takes credit for it by appending his or her own name. The most common example is the college “paper-mill” Web sites on which a student purchases an essay that someone else sold to it for the purpose of their reselling the work online. A different example is that of New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark, who engaged someone to paint pictures that she then signed and sold at a charity auction. In both instances the intention is to deceive deliberately, with both form and content plagiarized.

*Collusion.* Collusion occurs when the author of the intellectual content and sometimes the form of presentation of that content is part of a group who exchange ideas and information. Another member of the group presents the entire work as if all of it were that person’s own. One example would be students getting together to discuss an assignment intended to be an individual assignment. They each...
write up the assignment on their own but use each other’s ideas. The intent may or may not be to deceive deliberately. In such cases, content is always plagiarized, though form may not be.

**Author Is Unaware of Deception**

*Cut and Paste.* An individual, in this instance, copies the form containing the intellectual content without acknowledging the original author’s form, content, or both, and consequently gives the impression of ownership of form, content, or both. One such example is the cutting and pasting of a paragraph from a Web site into an essay or article without acknowledging the original source. Another example is historian Steven Ambrose’s failure to use quotation marks in some stories that gave the impression he was the author of the form of the story even where he had acknowledged the author of the content.

*Paraphrase.* Here, a person copies the intellectual content and changes the form without acknowledgment of the original source. Examples would be a journalist writing an article based on one press release and does not acknowledge the source, or the use of Ibrahim al-Marashi’s thesis by British Director of Communications Alistair Campbell that included both cutting and pasting and paraphrasing.

*Use of Content Only.* This refers to the use of intellectual content in a context without making use of the original form of presentation. Examples would be a grant application by someone based on the ideas of a former colleague or a screenplay based on a novel without acknowledgment.

In all these cases the intent may be to deceive. However, ignorance of referencing conventions or lack of skill may also play a part.

**Author Claims Partial Credit**

This occasionally happens in academia when the original author(s) of content and form are required to share credit, through coauthorship, with a more senior colleague or mentor by virtue of that person’s position in the organization rather than any contribution to the research or article. The noncontributing colleague is plagiarizing by allowing the readers to believe he or she was in part responsible for the intellectual content.

**A Brief History of Plagiarism**

Historians attribute the origin of the term *plagiarism* in its current sense to the first-century CE poet Martial, who stated that it was shameful for another poet to publicly read Martial’s poems as if they were his own. The word he used was *plagiarus*, which normally referred to someone who kidnapped a freed person and then enslaved him or her. Martial may or may not have been claiming ownership, but he was decrying the assigning of ownership to someone else, as in the modern sense of plagiarism.

The embedding of the belief into the modern Western psyche that an individual may own ideas and words may emanate from the Enlightenment and the rise of individualism. The separation of the created from the creator enabled the ascribing of ideas to the individual instead of the divine. The emergence of the printing press enabled the greater dissemination of these ideas, which had both economic and reputational consequences. The Statute of Anne of 1710 in Britain is considered the first copyright law attributing ownership and monopoly rights to authors. Since then, although copyright laws have changed, the right of an author of a piece of literature or artwork to be identified as the author has remained constant and is the dominant Western paradigm in which the concept of plagiarism resides. Consequently, many use the term *theft* to describe plagiarism, not in a legal sense, but as a metaphor to emphasize there is a “rightful” owner to form and a lowly social status to those who do not acknowledge the original source.

[https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/plagiarism](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/plagiarism)
not acknowledge that owner.

**In Academia**

Academia treats plagiarism seriously for two reasons. First, it devalues a profession based on honesty, and second, it undermines the fabric of advancement where recognition is through publication and citation.

Failure to properly acknowledge another academic is regarded as cheating someone out of that which is rightfully his or hers. Lack of acknowledgment may slow advancement and have financial implications for the individual and institution. Academics found to have plagiarized at any point of their career may find their careers cut short, as did Vice Chancellor (President) of Monash University Professor David Robinson.

Expectations are that students will operate within the academic paradigm by learning and obeying referencing conventions. Failure to do so affects not just the individual but the worth of the degree in the eyes of employers. Hence, the plagiarism of a few has social consequences for many.

**Frequency**

The Center for Academic Integrity, on the basis of self-reporting by 50,000 U.S. students, reported that half of them plagiarize in written assignments each year. Others estimate the plagiarizing of written assignments at 10 percent. Although many perceive plagiarism to be on the increase, its actuality awaits documentation from longitudinal studies.

**The Cyber Arms Race**

Countering students cutting and pasting from the World Wide Web or purchasing papers from paper mills are search engines and specially designed anti-plagiarism software. This software can detect even paraphrasing, not just wholesale copying.

Approaches to plagiarism include regulation and punishment, persuasion, and social change. Some academics are reluctant to follow up on possible plagiarism because of the personal cost to them in time and increased stress; others use the detection software as a deterrent, even having students use it before submitting papers. Most academics attempt to persuade through using their position of authority and educational skills. Some institutions try to change the values of the students through, for example, honor codes.

**Cultural Dimensions**

Plagiarism in the West rests on the assumptions that individuals can and do own their own words and content. This assumption remains strong despite philosophies such as deconstructionalism and relativism that tend to break down the assumption of absolute ownership of a work.

In many non-Western cultures, people find value in their relationships and position in society rather than in their expression of self. In such collectivist cultures, plagiarism is not recognized as a social wrong. Students from these cultures studying in Western institutions sometimes fail to grasp the significance to the Western academic of acknowledging the source of particular words or ideas. In addition, they may be reluctant to paraphrase or include their own ideas in a piece of writing, for this may be considered conceited. The globalization of education is, therefore, challenging the assumptions on which plagiarism rests.
See also
Cultural Relativism; Piracy

Further Readings

- Center for Academic Integrity. (www.academicintegrity.org).

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