

PLAGIARISM



When you copy someone else's words and make it look like they're yours, you've committed **plagiarism**. **Plagiarizing** is the worst, most disgraceful thing a writer can do.

the
expectation
of
originality

When people read what you write, turn in, blog about, or post, they make an important assumption—that it's an original work; in other words, you created what you produced from your own mind. If you use someone else's words, you must cite it; you must tell people, Hey! This next sentence isn't mine. It was written by...

don't
look like
a fool

Let's say you build a model car. You spent two weeks to do it, and you show it to your buddy. He says it's way cool. Just then, a third friend comes over. Your buddy says, "Hey look! Look at this cool car I built."



What would you think of your friend? You'd be angry and think he was a jerk. He was plagiarizing, because he was representing that someone else's work was his.

Don't look like a fool. Don't copy someone else's words and then make it look like they're your own.

inspiration
isn't
plagiarism

If you thought that your buddy's model car was awesome, and then you went out and made your own model car, that's not plagiarism.



That's inspiration.

If you read a story about a lost dog and the pain it caused a family, and the story moves you, and you write a story about your own dog and how she ran away one day when you were eight, and the unique experience of what your family went through, that's not plagiarism because you created the story in your own mind. Even though the plots are similar, you wrote your own words and didn't copy the words of the author that inspired you.

More info about **PLAGIARISM**

what counts
as
plagiarism?

If you copy more than 3-5 consecutive words from someone, you're getting dangerously close to plagiarism.

Original sentence:

The driveway behind Jack's house heard only the wind and the soft echoes of sound that glided along its length from the passing traffic on the nearby avenue.

If you write this, you're plagiarizing:

Sheila looked up, and **heard only the wind and the soft echoes of sound that glided along** the nearby avenue.

This isn't plagiarism, but it's getting sort of close:

Sheila looked up and heard soft sounds from the outside. The traffic was rushing down the avenue outside her house, and the sound of the traffic was louder than the soft wind she had heard earlier.

plot
plagiarism

The plot (what happens in a story) can't be too similar, either, even if the words are different. If you copy most of what happened, you've plagiarized the plot, if not the words, and that's just as disgraceful.

Original sentence:

Jack ran up to his apartment and saw broken glass and pieces of his smashed window on the ground. He heard a sound, spun around, and saw a woman with a blue hat pointing a gun straight at him.

If you write this, you're plagiarizing:

Jack bolted across the lawn to his house and saw shards of glass all over his lawn. He detected something, looked behind him, and saw his ex-girlfriend with a green scarf aiming a pistol toward his heart.

collaborating
isn't
plagiarizing

Of course people work together (collaborate) all the time to come up with great ideas. If you and two other people talk about ideas for great stories, that's wonderful. But when the three of you each write your story, each of you must write your own independent story that's entirely created from within your own mind.

You can use the ideas you came up with as a group, but you have to write your own words. You can't copy and paste sentences from your friend's blog and stick it into your paper.

a
circle
is
round

This “plagiarism” thing isn’t meant to be taken to a ridiculous degree that prevents you from writing what’s obvious.

If your teacher asks you to describe a circle in writing, all of you will write (you’d better, anyway) that “a circle is round.” This doesn’t mean you’ve plagiarized each other, because the only convenient way to describe a circle is something that’s round.

Let’s say that you and someone else were told to describe this picture:



In this case, if you wrote “a large tree blew over in the storm and smashed into the house, destroying it,” and another reporter wrote “a powerful storm knocked a huge tree into this house, destroying it,” there’s no plagiarism, because it’s reasonable to expect that two independent minds would come up with similar words to describe this scene.

However, let’s say you wrote: “Sadness. Shock. Fear. Terror. These are the emotions that tore through the Weber family as their family’s long time residence was obliterated, in one violent gust, by a tree which their children once climbed.”

And the other reporter wrote: “Shock, fear, terror, despair were the emotions that knocked down the Weber family as their home of 50 years was violently destroyed by a massive tree on which their children once played.”

Figure it out: did the second reporter plagiarize?

Answer: Yep. Why? Because it’s not reasonable to expect that two independent writers would separately come up with language that was so similar.

Name: _____

Date: _____

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SHOW THAT YOU KNOW

Answer all these questions correctly, and you're on your way to becoming an expert on plagiarism!

6 tasks

Circle "true" or "false":

- 1 true false Plagiarism occurs when you copy someone else's words. 1
- 2 true false Plagiarism is a good way to improve your writing. 1
- 3 true false If you write "birds have wings," you're probably plagiarizing. 1
- 4 true false If nobody catches you, it's OK to plagiarize. 1
- 5 true false If you copied ten consecutive words, you've plagiarized. 1

What is plagiarism?

Start with "Plagiarism is..."

6



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