

avoiding plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of another writer's ideas or words as one's own without citing that writer. It is a serious breach of ethics and carries penalties both at the School and in the field of copyright law. Although plagiarism may not be the result of a writer's intent to deceive, it is almost always an expression of the writer's insecurity with the subject. CUSSW's Writing Center provides handouts and guidance on how to best avoid plagiarism, and on the citation form (APA Style) used by the School and the Social Work profession. You may also want to consult with your instructors regarding the issue.

A student may resort to plagiarism when feeling under pressure to complete and turn in a paper on time. Also, using the Internet to conduct research makes it easy to copy and paste material from other sources, and easy to forget that it needs to be rewritten and properly cited. Proper citation must be made for ideas and words derived from some other source, whether quoted, paraphrased, or summarized, and for facts that are not common knowledge. For example, you must write out the last name of an author(s) and the year of publication: Lee (2010) noted that any author cited in the paper must also be listed on the Reference page. When using the verbatim words (a phrase, a sentence, or more) of another, they must be enclosed within quotation marks, and the page number (or paragraph number if using an internet source without page numbers) must be noted: Lee (2010) stated that "text citations must appear on the Reference page" (p.235).

Related to this is the overuse of quoted matter when writing papers. A paper containing an abundance of quotations may indicate to the instructor that the student knows where certain information can be found but not whether the student understands it. Quotations should be used sparingly (a ten page paper, for example, should include at most two or three quotations) and only when you need to 1) state an essential theory, model, or point of someone; 2) provide explicit credibility for a point you are making; or 3) capture how something of great consequence is expressed.

When reading a journal article, you will notice frequent reference to other authors but few quotations. The writer of that article has instead paraphrased and summarized the writings of others, providing proper citations throughout. Effective use of paraphrase and summary will help you to avoid plagiarism and grasp the full meaning of an author's words. Written in your own words, a paraphrase or summary provides the essential information and ideas of someone else. A very few important terms and phrases from the source may be included in your paraphrase; that is, two or three consecutive words (i.e., a term, a model, a theory) may be used without quotation marks.

Developing proficient paraphrasing and summarizing skills may take time to achieve, but the long term benefits will make the effort worthwhile. Practice reading a passage from an article a few times; then put it aside and, in your own words, write out a paraphrase or summary of that passage. An analogy to keep in mind may be how a piece of music can be interpreted in countless ways, showing that there are many different and unique ways of expressing the ideas of another.