WAC Writing Guides: PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism includes any form of dishonest representation of your coursework, such as submitting a paper that someone else has written or failing to document any source material you use in your paper. When you plagiarize, you present information from another source as if it were your own. In the first case, the offense is a deliberate act of cheating. In the second case, the offense often comes about because of the student’s ignorance of the need to document source material or inexperience with the proper ways to do so. This form of plagiarism is still very serious, however, and you should take care to avoid it by always documenting any words, ideas, information, or other material that is not your original thought or creation. When you document (or cite) your sources, you give credit to the original source, using the documentation style appropriate for your paper/discipline (e.g., MLA, APA, or Chicago style).

Material that must always be documented and credited to its source:
- Words and ideas presented in another source (whether they are quoted directly, paraphrased, or summarized)
- Someone else’s observations, insights, thoughts, reasoning, or conclusions about a subject
- Statistics and other specific factual information
- 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
- Words and ideas gathered from interviews you conduct yourself

Material that you do not need to document or 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:
  - Generally accepted facts
  - Historical dates and other common facts of history
  - Common sense observations
  - Information on a subject that can be found in most general references consulted about that subject (e.g. several encyclopedia articles on the subject)
  - Generally known facts, terms, and concepts in a particular field of study when you are writing in that field

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No documentation needed:</th>
<th>Documentation needed:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The term <em>ego</em> in a paper for psychology class</td>
<td>A psychologist who disputes Freud’s ideas about the ego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The dates for the American Revolution, or the fact that the Colonies defeated the British</td>
<td>A historian who analyzes the causes of the Colonies’ victory over the British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fact that more and more people are using social media</td>
<td>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</td>
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Avoiding Plagiarism When You Quote, Paraphrase, and Summarize Sources

Original Source:

In an effort to seek the causes of this disturbing trend, experts have pointed to a range of important potential contributors to the rise in childhood obesity that are unrelated to media.


Plagiarism:

1. According to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (2004), experts have pointed to a range of important potential contributors to the rise in childhood obesity that are unrelated to media (p. 1).

2. According to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (2004), experts have indicated a range of significant potential contributors to the rise in childhood obesity that are not linked to media (p. 1).

3. According to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (2004), experts have identified a variety of significant factors causing a rise in childhood obesity, factors that are not linked to media (p. 1).

Even though the source is cited in each case (using APA style), each sentence above constitutes plagiarism, an unacceptable borrowing of the source idea. Why?

The first sentence presents the exact language of the source without indicating such with quotation marks. Always enclose the words of the source in quotation marks.

The second sentence mixes the writer's own words with phrases from the source without using quotation marks. Always restate the source idea entirely in your own words when you paraphrase.

The third sentence uses the same sentence structure as the source, merely substituting synonyms for some of the words. Always restate the source idea using a sentence structure different from that of the original sentence when you paraphrase.

Acceptable Presentation of the Source:

Direct quotation, with borrowed language in quotation marks:

According to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (2004), “experts have pointed to a range of important potential contributors to the rise in childhood obesity that are unrelated to media” (p. 1).

Paraphrase:

A report by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (2004) described sources other than media for the childhood obesity crisis (p. 1).


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