

Intellectual Integrity and Defensive Documentation

The Context: In Anglo-American cultures, we consider our words, ideas, images, data, or models our intellectual property; we believe they, like any other possession, belong to us and cannot be used without our permission. A type of intellectual dishonesty—plagiarism-- occurs when we borrow another's intellectual property and do not acknowledge that we have done so.

The Basics: Therefore, when we write papers that require research, we must tell our readers where we obtained any ideas, assertions, figures, data, etc. that are not originally our own. Whether we quote directly, summarize, or paraphrase the information, we must acknowledge our sources by citing them. In this way, we obtain "permission" to use another's intellectual contributions by giving that person credit for the work s/he has done.

Paraphrasing and summarizing are variations on a theme: both restate the content of a source. Paraphrases tend to reproduce the level of detail and the length of the original source. A summary, however, is a synthesis of the key contents of a source. It typically reduces the amount of source information and may include substantial reorganization of the source information while maintaining the meaning and intent of the original. As stated above, both paraphrases and summaries require citation of original sources.

Some information is considered “common knowledge,” which can include dates, proverbs, and facts that are familiar to a large, identifiable group of people, including your audience. This kind of information requires no documentation. Some examples of “common knowledge” follow:

- Almost 50% of all marriages in the US end in divorce.
- The city of Mumbai in India was called Bombay until several years ago.
- AIDS is a major global health problem.
- The Boston Marathon takes place every Patriot’s Day.

Caveat: Even when acknowledging and summarizing a source, however, we can risk plagiarizing. Plagiarism can occur when a writer attempts to paraphrase a source’s exact expression of ideas but uses phrases that are too close to those of the original source.

Plagiarism is taken seriously in academic, professional and public life. Even inadvertent plagiarism can result in serious consequences. For example, in academia, a student may receive a failing grade or even have his degree revoked; a professional can lose her job or reputation.

Protection: We can avoid plagiarism by taking several steps:

1. Read first, then write. You must understand something completely before you can paraphrase or summarize it. You may want to read the material more than once before you start.

2. Use quotation marks around any “content rich phrases” that we cite verbatim from the original source and provide clear documentation in two places: within the document and at the end of the document in the References or Works Cited section. (Quote sparingly.)

3. Reword information in summaries and paraphrases to ensure that the exact phrasing from the original sources does not appear. The five most common ways to change the original language of a source when paraphrasing or summarizing are

- Use synonyms.
- Change the sentence types and length.
- Change clauses to phrases or phrases to clauses.
- Change the order of the paraphrased words, phrases and sentences from that of the original.
- Change the voice (active-passive).
- Change parts of speech (subject, verb, object).

4. Treat all models, tables, figures, data sets, algorithms and images created by someone else as if they are summaries. No quotation marks are needed. But we must provide clear documentation of our sources in two places: within the document and at the end of the document in the References or Works Cited section.

Practice in flexible language: Identify the strategies used to change the language in the following paraphrases.

(Adapted from an exercise by Patricia Brennecke, MIT’s ELS group)

1. *Original:* With new supply-chain software, manufacturers can more closely pinpoint how much raw material they need to buy.

Paraphrase: Modern supply-chain software helps manufacturers predict the amount of raw materials they will have to purchase.

2. *Original:* Cultural beliefs differ as to whether directness or indirectness in communication is considered positive.

Paraphrase: While some cultures value a direct style of communication, others do not.

3. *Original:* Academic success cannot always be predicted because many variables affect one's success.

Paraphrase: Predicting whether or not a student will succeed academically is not always easy. Many factors influence performance.

Practice in Recognizing Acceptable Use: Read the source text and then compare it with each of the potential uses that follow. The usage may involve a summary, a paraphrase, or a combination, and may include quotations. In each case ask, "Is the potential use

acceptable or does it demonstrate plagiarism?" (Note: This exercise comes from Robert Harris, *Using Sources Effectively*, Pycszak Publishing, 2002, and uses APA citation style.)

Source text

To communicate effectively with other people, one must have a reasonably accurate idea of what they do and do not know that is pertinent to the communication. Treating people as though they have knowledge that they do not have can result in miscommunication and perhaps embarrassment. On the other hand, a fundamental rule of conversation, at least according to a Gricean view, is that one generally does not convey to others information that one can assume they already have (Grice, 1975). A speaker who overestimates what his or her listeners know may talk over their heads; one who underestimates their knowledge may, in the interest of being clear, be perceived as talking down to them. Both types of misjudgment work against effective and efficient communication (Nickerson, 1999, p. 737).

Potential use 1

To communicate effectively, we must have a reasonably accurate idea of what our listeners do and do not know that is pertinent to the communication. Treating people as if they know something they do not can result in miscommunication and perhaps embarrassment. On the other hand, a foundational rule of conversation, at least according to a Gricean view, is that we usually do not convey to others information that we can assume they already have (Grice, 1975). A speaker who overestimates what his or her listeners know may talk over their heads, while someone who underestimates their knowledge may be perceived as talking down to them. Both mistakes work against effective and efficient communication (Nickerson, 1999, p. 737).

___ Acceptable Use ___ Plagiarism

Potential use 2

For effective communication, it is necessary to have a fairly accurate idea of what our listeners know or do not know that is pertinent to the communication. If we assume that people know something they do not, then miscommunication and perhaps embarrassment may result. At the same time, a fundamental rule of conversation is that we should not convey information that we assume our listeners already have. If our assumption is wrong, we may talk over our listeners' heads, or possibly be perceived as talking down to them. Both errors work against effective and efficient communication (Nickerson, 1999, p. 737).

___ Acceptable Use ___ Plagiarism

Potential use 3

Nickerson (1999) argues that effective communication depends on a generally accurate knowledge of what the audience knows that "is pertinent to the communication." If a speaker assumes too much knowledge about the subject, the audience will either misunderstand or be bewildered. However, assuming too little knowledge among those in the audience may cause them to feel patronized. In either case, the communication will be less successful than it could have been (p. 737).

___ Acceptable Use ___ Plagiarism

Potential use 4

As Nickerson (1999) reminds us, "To communicate effectively with other people, one must have a reasonably accurate idea of what they do and do not know that is pertinent to the communication" (p. 737). If we treat people as if they have knowledge that they do not have, we can cause miscommunication and perhaps embarrassment. On the other hand, it is important not to convey to others information that we can assume they already have. A speaker who overestimates what his or her listeners know may talk over their heads, and one who underestimates their knowledge may be perceived as talking down to them. Both of these wrong estimations work against effective and efficient communication.

___ Acceptable Use ___ Plagiarism

Potential use 5

We are informed by Nickerson (1999), "To communicate effectively with other people, one must have a reasonably accurate idea of what they do and do not know that is pertinent to the communication." It is crucial to assume neither too much nor too little knowledge of the subject by the audience, or the communication may be inhibited by either confusion or offense (p. 737).

___ Acceptable Use ___ Plagiarism

Potential use 6

If we are to engage in effective communication, we must not talk down to our audience nor talk beyond their understanding. It is therefore very important that we have a generally accurate idea of what our audience knows about the subject.

___ Acceptable Use ___ Plagiarism

Answer Key: Practice in Recognizing Acceptable Use

Potential use 1. Plagiarism. This passage is virtually a word-for-word copy (with only a few words changed here and there), yet there are no quotation marks or other indication that it is a quotation: The citation by itself is inadequate indication of the source. Quoted words must always be marked with quotation marks. Changing a few words here and there does not change the fact that most of the words are quoted.

Potential use 2. Plagiarism. This passage is an inadequate paraphrase of Nickerson, since the passage has many words and phrases that echo the source. Also note that, as in Potential Use 1 above, the passage does not have an opening tag to indicate where the use of the source begins. A citation at the end of a paragraph is not sufficient to indicate what is being credited to the source.

Potential use 3. Acceptable use. This passage is an acceptable summary of Nickerson's words, and where it uses an exact phrase, it puts the phrase in quotation marks. Note the opening tag, "Nickerson (1999) argues," to indicate the beginning of the use of the source.

Potential use 4. Plagiarism. This passage begins with a properly quoted and cited passage; but then it continues with a lightly modified quotation of the subsequent words in Nickerson's passage. The implication to the reader is that the words and ideas following the cited quotation are the student's, when in fact they are still Nickerson's.

Potential use 5. Acceptable use. This is an appropriate combination of quotation and summary, with the summary in the student's own words and the citation in the proper place. Note that the beginning tag, "We are informed by," and the concluding citation enclose the borrowed material completely:

Potential use 6. Plagiarism. Even though the student here has not quoted the passage word for word, the ideas have been taken from the passage and not cited. The lack of citation of sources is plagiarism.

Practice in paraphrasing: Write a paraphrase of each of the following passages from Purdue University Online Writing Lab. (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>).

1. "The Antarctic is the vast source of cold on our planet, just as the sun is the source of our heat, and it exerts tremendous control on our climate," [Jacques] Cousteau told the camera. "The cold ocean water around Antarctica flows north to mix with warmer water from the tropics, and its upwellings help to cool both the surface water and our atmosphere. Yet the fragility of this regulating system is now threatened by human activity."

(From "Captain Cousteau," Audubon (May 1990):17.)

2. Of the more than 1000 bicycling deaths each year, three-fourths are caused by head injuries. Half of those killed are school-age children. One study concluded that wearing a bike helmet can reduce the risk of head injury by 85 percent. In an accident, a bike helmet absorbs the shock and cushions the head.
(From "Bike Helmets: Unused Lifesavers," Consumer Reports (May 1990): 348.)

Practicing in summarizing: Read the following text on genetic engineering in food. Summarize both paragraphs into *one* three-sentence paragraph.

Experiments in genetic engineering have created important new developments in many areas; they have led to cures for many diseases, the control of insect populations, and the improvement of food production. However, most of these experiments are not without some risks; no one knows for sure what negative consequences they could have.

On the other hand, many people recognize that genetically manipulated food can bring many benefits to our lives. It could increase food production throughout the world and begin to solve the hunger problem. It could improve the taste and life of food. Genetically engineered food could also end our dependence on pesticides to protect crops; if fewer pesticides were used, the problem of pesticide residue in food could be reduced. Finally, these foods could provide a boon to the food industry, which could help the general economy.

(Text from Carol Numrich's, Consider the Issues Longman, 1995)

Possible Paraphrase Solutions

1. According to Jacques Cousteau, the activity of people in Antarctica is jeopardizing a delicate natural mechanism that controls the earth's climate. He fears that human activity could interfere with the balance between the sun, the source of the earth's heat, and the important source of cold from Antarctic waters that flow north and cool the oceans and atmosphere ("Captain Cousteau" 17).

2. The use of a helmet is the key to reducing bicycling fatalities, which are due to head injuries 75% of the time. By cushioning the head upon impact, a helmet can reduce accidental injury by as much as 85%, saving the lives of hundreds of victims annually, half of whom are school children ("Bike Helmets" 348).

Possible Summarizing Solution

Genetic engineering is already responsible for positive developments in a range of areas from health care and pest control to food production. In the future, it could decrease world hunger, improve the quality of food, and lead to economic growth. However, we still do not know the risks of this technology.

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